

Fate's Expose by Cassandra Starflower

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Summary: You know all those 'watching the show/movies' or 'reading the books' fics out there? Well, here's one. The citizens of Hawkins, Indiana did not expect to be abducted by a goddess, informed that they were fictional characters, and forced to watch their own TV show. Nor did they expect the secrets they were shown. But there's no turning back. Run by OCs. The Party has powers.

1. The Vanishing of Will Byers

It was a normal day. Until it wasn't.

Hawkins Middle School. Science Classroom.

Everyone was just sitting, listening to Mr. Clarke's lecture on the heart. Most kids were bored to death. Others were actually listening. And then the room flickered.

Briefly, the room darkened, with rot and decay. Vines crept across the walls. Spores floated in the air. Blood stained the ground under Mr. Clarke's desk.

Someone screamed. Will hunched his shoulders and shut his eyes. El looked around, hands clenched into fists. The other Party members reacted with a level of fear above that of their classmates.

The room returned to normal. Mr. Clarke went to the door, looking out. He was far from the only teacher to do so. Others peered out, muttering, calling to one another.

The Party, meanwhile, hunched together, whispering frantically; their classmates and teacher only caught a few words: "... not safe..." "...how did this happen..." "...not normal..." "...happen everywhere?..."

"Ahem." Mr. Clarke cleared his throat. "While I don't know what just happened, everyone please remain calm."

"Calm!" someone shrieked. "Calm?!"

"Yes, calm." Mr. Clarke sighed.

And then the room spun, the edges blurring, the whole place darkening, and everything disappeared...

Hawkins High School. Math Classroom.

Math. Steve really disliked math. Mainly because the teacher seemed determined to make everyone fall asleep. Well, the room turning into

the Upside Down sure woke him up.

His classmates were babbling, confusion turning quickly to fear. He tensed, wishing he had his nailbat. Or, hell, that Nancy and Jonathan were here.

And then the room spun, the edges blurring, the whole place darkening, and everything disappeared...

Hawkins High School. History Classroom.

Nancy and Jonathan immediately reacted when their classroom turned into the Upside Down. Nancy reached for her gun, hidden in her waistband under her jacket. She didn't pull it out- not yet. The classroom almost immediately returned to normal, but every one of their classmates had seen it. Fear flooded the classroom.

The two exchanged a dark look, silently asking- 'What do we do?'

The teacher uselessly attempted to regain control.

Chaos reigned.

And then the room spun, the edges blurring, the whole place darkening, and everything disappeared...

Meverly's General Store.

Of all the things to happen at work, Joyce had never expected the entire store to turn into the Upside Down. Customers were shrieking, Donald was trying to calm everyone, and then the whole place went back to normal. Joyce rushed to the door, looking out. Everyone outside was reacting, so it had clearly happened everywhere. She thought of her sons, at school. Her heart squeezed and she wished she could just run to the schools and find them.

And then the room spun, the edges blurring, the whole place darkening, and everything disappeared...

Hawkins Police Department. Bull Pen.

The room flickered. Turned into the Upside Down. Hopper pulled his

gun- and he wasn't the only one. Powell moved over to him as soon as the room returned to normal.

"The hell is happening, Chief?"

"I don't know, but I don't like it one bit." He hoped the kids were doing alright. Jane and Will would definitely react badly to this.

And then the room spun, the edges blurring, the whole place darkening, and everything disappeared...

Citadel of the Ancients. TV Room.

The room was large. A screen took up the far wall. The walls were painted cheerful yellow. The floor had wall-to-wall plush orange carpeting.

Everyone was looking around, bewildered. Teachers started doing headcounts and ensuring they had all their students. Parents rushed to find their families as well, and the police tried to call for order (meaning Hopper did, thanks to being used to such things).

"Hey!" he barked. "Everyone shut up!"

Eventually, everyone did.

"Oh, thank you, Chief Hopper. That saves me the trouble." A girl's voice rang out. Everyone whipped around, startled. The girl was slight, short, with curly, pixie-cut honey-colored hair, and apple-green eyes. She wore thick black plastic glasses and her cheeks were covered in freckles. She stood by the far wall. She was barefoot and wore a white bodysuit. As they stared, she gestured.

"I am Fate. Why don't you all sit while I explain some things to you?" They suddenly noticed the couches scattered around, and moments later were sitting, with no idea how they'd gotten there.

"I'm going to be showing you my absolute *favorite* TV show." She enthused, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

"A TV show? You somehow kidnapped us all to watch a *freaking* TV show?" demanded Hopper, clearly trying to avoid swearing.

"Yes, exactly. Here, let me give you a summary of the show." She smiled mysteriously. "It all happens over two seasons. The first season starts in a small town in Indiana, when a young boy disappears. From there, everything kinda snowballs. There is a government conspiracy, and you know, teenage drama, bullies, the usual, oh, and a monster, *hungry for blood*. And one very strange little girl."

That... sounded awfully familiar for the PartyPlus. For everyone else, it was just confusing.

"The second season also involves even more strange occurrences. You could say, *Stranger Things*." She chuckled. "The second season deals with the consequences of the first, as well as some new characters. Of course, the show is called 'Stranger Things' and it is absolutely amazing. *And*, it's about people you know! It takes place in Hawkins, mostly."

"What?" questioned Claudia Henderson.

"Yep. There's one episode that takes place partly in Chicago, and another part at the very beginning of Season Two that takes place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Season One takes place November 1983."

"That's the month Will Byers disappeared." Remarked Powell. Fate nodded.

"Season Two takes place in October, November, and December 1984."

"What happened then?" asked Tommy H, confused.

"Oh, here, I'll show you the episode list." She remarked absently. She pulled out a remote and clicked it a few times. The screen turned on and showed a logo- NETFLIX. Red on a black background. There was a set of pictures with names accompanying them, and the question 'Who's watching today?' She selected a square with a cartoon image of a girl with straight black hair, blue eyes, freckles, and a smirk, labeled FATE. Then she clicked through a bunch of squares with images, showing things like a girl in red and black (she looked like a superhero), a cartoon image of girls in glittery clothes, another cartoon image of what appeared to be a female Frankenstein, what appeared to be Iron Man, and a number of others.

"These are different movies or TV shows," she explained. "We get them on demand. Most of them, at least. Oh, right. In my universe, my home universe that is, you are all fictional characters. In a TV show. So, for me, it's 2018. For you, it's 1984."

"The- the future? An alternate universe? I knew they would be different, but..." Mr. Clarke trailed off.

"Yeah. Pretty different. But anyway, yeah. You're fictional characters. The fanbase is insane. Seriously. You've got the rabid fangirls who are totally in love with some character or another, you've got the perverts- there aren't many of those thank goodness. You've got the people who obsessively binge-watch all seventeenish hours of it. You've got the Steve Protection Squad-

"The what." Steve stared at her.

"The Steve Protection Squad. I'm not sure they've actually got a name, but whatever. You know, the ones like that fanfic writer who tagged their fic with 'I never thought 'I'd die for Steve Harrington' was something I'd be saying in 2017'. You've also got the Billy apologists, you know, the ones who have crushes on the actor and can't see that he's an asshole. You've got the Mileven shippers versus the Byler shippers and then the Milevill shippers. You've got the Jancy and Stancy shippers and the Stoncy shippers."

"Mileven? Byler? Milevill? Jancy? Stancy? Stoncy? Those aren't words." Snapped the high school English teacher.

"They are too. They're name combos. You know, they're pairings. Like, you know, couple names?" Fate kept clicking. "Well, fandoms are weird. I'm pretty sure there's also a Will Byers Protection Squad and also a group dedicated to convincing the Duffer brothers (they make the show in my universe) to give Will and Eleven a break- they've succeeded, I think there was an official announcement to that effect- and that group also is in the middle of trying to persuade them not to kill Mike off. I think they'll succeed, though, that was only a rumor."

"W-what?" asked Will, both about the whole protection squad thing and the whole 'killing Mike off' thing.

"Well, yeah. I mean, the rumor only got started because the actor is so busy, they're filming a sequel to IT and everything." She kept clicking. "Jesus, this is annoying. It should be here."

"Whaddya mean?" asked Callahan. Fate ignored him.

"Ugh, where the heck did it go?" she complained. "I was watching it just yesterday, for the billionth time; I was rewatching 'The Weirdo on Maple Street'. I see Miraculous, Ever After High, Monster High, Marvel, W.I.T.C.H., Harry Potter, eww, why the heck do I even have the *Peter Johnson* movies in here? Those are the worst movie adaptations ever. Oh, here it is!"

The square showed Hopper shining a flashlight on rotting pumpkins. When she stopped on it, the background changed to a creepy sky and four kids on bikes.

"Here, here we go. I'm gonna need to be careful, it autoplays. I don't wanna watch Episode Three of Season One, that episode, well, um, teenagers doing stupid stuff." She grimaced and clicked the remote. She then hastily clicked to More Episodes. Here they saw a list of episodes.

"Here we go. Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers. Chapter Two: The Weirdo on Maple Street. Chapter Three: Holly, Jolly."

Holly Wheeler looked up at the sound of her name, looking curious.

"Chapter Four: The Body. Chapter Five: The Flea and the Acrobat."

Mr. Clarke suddenly remembered Will's funeral and his explanation of the multiverse theory.

"Chapter Six: The Monster. Chapter Seven: The Bathtub."

Someone snorted, and she frowned. "*Troy*. I suggest you don't snort. Besides, that's a really good episode. Chapter Eight: The Upside Down. That's it for season One. Now season Two. Chapter One: MADMAX."

Max glanced at the other Party members, all of them looking back. That was three Party members mentioned in titles, because they all

knew that the "weirdo on Maple Street" was El.

"Chapter Two: Trick or Treat, Freak. Chapter Three: The Pollywog. Chapter Four: Will the Wise."

Several people glanced in Will's direction and he looked down, nervous.

"Chapter Five: Dig Dug. Chapter Six: The Spy."

Will and Mike exchanged a look.

"Chapter Seven: The Lost Sister. Chapter Eight: The Mind Flayer."

Will flinched.

"Chapter Nine: The Gate. Those are all the episodes. Shall we watch them?" She smiled politely. "I will likely be blacking or muting various parts, because I suffer from *terrible* secondary embarrassment. Oh, but don't worry, Troy's humiliation in 'The Body' will remain intact. I don't worry too much about the people I dislike. I will only be blacking and muting embarrassing parts regarding the PartyPlus."

"PartyPlus?" questioned Mr. Clarke.

"Oh, yeah. That's Hopper, Mrs. Byers, Jonathan, Nancy, Steve, Mike, Will, Dustin, Lucas, Max, and Jane."

She adjusted her position on her armchair, then pulled out another remote and clicked it a few times. In the corner of the screen, numbers appeared, negative but moving toward positive. She put the remote down and the numbers vanished. "Volume." She explained.

"We start with Episode One." Her lips curled into a wicked, energetic smile. "Here we go."

The scene shows stars. The camera pans down to show Hawkins Lab, with the words NOVEMBER 6, 1983 appearing on the screen. It cuts to inside the Lab, and a door, sealed shut.

El tensed, recognizing the door. She wasn't the only one; Hopper and Joyce both recognized it- they'd gone through to get to the Gate.

The door flies open, and a man in a white lab coat sprints out, hurtling down the hallway, panicked breathing loud and harsh. He reaches an elevator and punches the button repeatedly, turning to look over his shoulder.

"What is he running from?" asked Callahan. Fate didn't respond at first, then she said, "Well, let's just say one of their experiments went very wrong."

A steady boom sounds, slowly getting louder.

Mike, Dustin, and Lucas all glanced at Will, with Dustin quietly complaining "You didn't tell us that!" Will hunched his shoulders. "I was a little more occupied with the teeth." He retorted.

Several people glanced at them, curious.

The lights flicker.

"Seems like the Department of Energy should be able to get lights that don't flicker." Remarked Mr. Sinclair. "Then again, that was the day those blackouts all happened, wasn't it?"

"You'll see." Murmured Fate.

The elevator doors open and the scientist ducks in before they're fully open. He repeatedly hits the button, before straightening and staring at the hallway, sweating. The doors begin to close. The man looks up abruptly, eyes widening. Then he flies upward as the doors close.

Will winced, remembering how the Demogorgon had appeared where he hadn't expected it. Right behind him.

"What the heck?" exclaimed Ted Wheeler.

"What was that?" gasped Claudia, shocked.

The screen cuts to the Wheeler basement, and Mike speaking. "Do you hear that? Listen... Something is coming. Something hungry for blood. A shadow grows on the wall behind you, swallowing you in darkness. It is almost here."

"So dramatic." Laughed Nancy, while a number of other people looked relieved.

"It's *not* funny, Nancy." Mike snapped, wrapping an arm around Will. The other boys nodded solemnly. Nancy blinked in shock.

"What is it?" asks Will.

"What if it's the Demogorgon?" Dustin asks. Will flops back, and Dustin grabs his hat. "We're in deep shit if it's the Demogorgon."

Now, Nancy looked a little disturbed, and Max stared at Dustin for several seconds before she leaned forward and poked his forehead. He jerked back. She grinned and leaned back in her seat, offering no explanation for her actions. She didn't need to. The whole Party had unlocked latent psychic abilities, after all, and Dustin's tended toward the telepathic.

"It's not the Demogorgon." Says Lucas. He, Dustin, and Will all look towards Mike, who is smiling. He puts a piece down. "An army of troglodytes charge into the chamber!" he exclaims, and the other three look relieved. "Their tails drum the floor. Boom! Boom! Boom!"

"Troglodytes?" Dustin demands.

"Told you!" Lucas tells Dustin, grinning. Dustin huffs.

"Wait..." says Mike slowly, looking around. "Do you hear that?"

Everyone tensed and leaned forward, except for the Party, who all glanced at each other.

"Boom!" Mike leans forward. "Boom! Boom! That sound, it didn't come from the troglodytes. No. It came from something else. The Demogorgon!" He slams the piece down on the board, and the other three cry out.

Several people slumped in relief.

"We're in deep shit." exclaims Dustin.

"Will, your action." Urges Mike.

"I- I don't know!" Will yelps.

"Fireball him!" Lucas yells.

"I'd have to roll thirteen or higher!" Will says.

"Too risky. Cast a protection spell." Dustin advises.

"Don't be a pussy. Fireball him!" Lucas tells Will.

"Protection spell." Dustin repeats.

"The Demogorgon is tired of your silly human bickering!" Mike yells. "He stomps toward you! Boom!"

Fate chuckled. "That reminds me of when my sister and I get way into our role-plays. We end up yelling and running around like crazy people. Plus, you boys can just be so ridiculous- and that's not an insult."

The boys exchanged confused looks.

"Fireball him, Will!" Lucas shouts.

"Another step. Boom!" Mike says.

"Cast protection." Dustin urges.

"It roars in anger." Mike says.

Dustin and Lucas speak at the same time- "Fireball!" "Protection!"

"And..." Mike says.

"Fireball!" yells Will, throwing the die. They scatter across the table and fall off. The boys scramble to their feet, knocking over their chairs, and start searching.

"What is it?" asks Lucas.

"I don't know!" Will responds.

"Is it a thirteen?" asks Dustin.

"I don't know!" Will repeats.

The basement door opens, and Karen appears.

"Mom! We're in the middle of a campaign!"

"You mean the end? Fifteen after." She taps her watch.

At this point Troy rolled his eyes. "When are we going to get back to the interesting stuff? Like the guy at the Lab?"

Fate frowned at him. "This is important, the stuff here. Also, this is interesting. It's cool!"

Troy scowled. "But we're just watching a bunch of nerds playing stupid nerd games, how is this important?"

Most people looked like they agreed.

Fate sighed. "It's the buildup; you're getting to know the characters. And it foreshadows the entire season, practically. The whole show is like a giant Dungeons and Dragons game. A giant, dangerous Dungeons and Dragons game."

Troy groaned.

Mike follows his mother. "Just twenty more minutes?"

"It's a school night, Michael. And I just put Holly to bed. You can finish next weekend."

"That'll ruin the flow-"

"Michael."

"I'm serious mom! The campaign took two weeks to plan! How was I supposed to know it would take ten hours?"

"You've been playing for ten hours?" demands Karen. Mike gets an 'oops' look on his face, then turns toward his dad, who is adjusting the TV antennae. "Dad, don't you think-"

"I think you should listen to your mother. Daggum piece of junk!" Ted

responds. The scene cuts back to the basement, where Will has just found the die.

"Got it! Does the seven count?"

"It was a seven?" Will nods. "Did Mike see it?" Lucas asks. Will shakes his head. "Then it doesn't count!" Lucas tells him.

"Cheaters!" laughed Mike.

The boys gather their things and head upstairs. Dustin pauses by the empty pizza box. "Hey guys, anyone want this?" Lucas and Will shake their heads. Dustin heads upstairs and stops by Nancy's room, where Nancy is on the phone. "I know, I know, but- I don't think so. Yeah, he's cute, but- Barb, Barb. Listen to me."

Nancy smiled sadly.

Dustin knocks on the doorframe and holds up the pizza box, smiling hopefully. "Hey Nancy, there's a slice left if you want. Pepperoni and sausage."

Nancy glances over. "Hold on." She gets up, walks over, and slams the door.

"Sorry." Nancy muttered, glancing over at Dustin. He shrugged.

Dustin emerges from the house stuffing the pizza slice into his mouth. He grabs his bike. "There's something wrong with your sister."

The other boys look over. "What're you talking about?" asks Mike.

"She's got a stick up her butt."

Now it was Dustin's turn to apologize.

"It's 'cause she's dating that douchebag Steve Harrington." Lucas says.

"Yeah," Dustin agrees. "She's turning into a real jerk."

"She's always been a real jerk." Mike responds.

"Nu-uh. She used to be cool. Remember when she dressed up as an elf for

our Eldertree campaign?"

Carol snickered, glancing over at Nancy, who raised an eyebrow and nodded over at the screen.

"Four years ago!" Mike says.

"Just saying."

"Um, sorry." Lucas told Steve, who shrugged.

Lucas and Dustin pedal off. Will hesitates, glancing at Mike, who is looking after the other two.

"It was a seven." Will tells Mike.

"Hmm?" Mike responds.

"The roll, it was a seven. The Demogorgon, it got me. See you tomorrow." Will pushes off and pedals away. The garage lights flicker. Mike looks up at them, then turns the lights off and walks inside.

"No, no, no." muttered Mike. "I should've stopped you."

Will shook his head. "Doesn't matter. I'm fi-"

"Don't." Mike snapped.

Most others looked on in confusion. Fate coughed. "Remember the episode title? The Vanishing of Will Byers. We're getting there. Also, can I just say that little discussion was adorable."

Will and Mike exchanged a look.

The boys pedal down a road. Lucas peels off with a "Goodnight ladies!" Dustin hollers, "Kiss your mom goodnight for me!"

"Race to my house? Winner gets a comic." Dustin says. Will looks over. "Any comic?"

"Yeah."

Will stands up on his pedals and bikes faster.

"Hey! Hey! I didn't say go!" Dustin yells, trying to catch up. "I'm gonna kill you!"

Will skids past Dustin's mailbox. "I'll take your X-Men 134!"

Dustin slides to a stop. "Son of a bitch!" he sighs.

Dustin looked abashed as multiple people frowned at him. "I didn't mean it! And I apologized later."

"It's true, he did." Will said.

Will pedals along a road. The camera cuts to a chain-link fence, with a sign reading DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY and DO NOT TRESPASS. The camera cuts back to Will. The light on his bike goes out and he looks down at it.

"You know, this part always stresses me out even though I'm not there and I know what's going to happen." Remarked Fate. She then shrugged. "Then again, everything stresses me out. At least I haven't yelled at the screen yet. Though I will."

"What?" snipped Tommy. "His bike light went out, what's the big deal?"

"What?" Amora snipped right back. "The lights at the Lab were flickering, remember?"

Several people now looked worried. The Party, meanwhile, were curling around a visibly freaked Will.

Will's bike light flickers back on and he looks up. The camera cuts to a figure, weirdly elongated and distorted, then cuts back to Will, who gasps and swerves off the road. He rises to his knees, staring, then whips around and starts running. He runs down a path and reaches his house, running in. He slides the chain across. Chester runs to meet him.

"Mom? Jonathan? Mom?" he runs down the hallway, then back to the living room, where he grabs the blinds and ducks under them, peering out the window.

"Oh, my God." Muttered Mrs. Sinclair. "What is that thing?"

Several other people muttered to one another, snippets like "Why didn't we hear about this?" and "Poor child" filtering through.

The camera shows the thing approaching the house. Will tenses and runs to the phone, dialing. He holds the phone against his ear.

"Hello? Hello?!"

The camera shows the front door, and the shadow looming through it. The scene cuts to Will, peering around the corner, then back to the door, and the chain sliding slowly, then dropping. Will drops the phone and runs through the back door, out to the shed.

"How?" gasps Claudia, shocked. "How did that happen?"

"Truth be told, I don't know exactly how it moved the chain like that." Fate responded.

Will lifts a gun off of a rack, then fumbles with the ammunition, before loading the gun and pointing it at the shed door, trembling. Several seconds pass, then he abruptly turns. He looks behind him, clearly terrified. The camera cuts to the lightbulb, which is brightening. The lightbulb dims, then the camera shows the empty shed.

"What-how-" people babbled. Fate smirked and said lazily, "You don't even get a good look at it 'til episode Six."

"WHAT." Someone sputtered. "WHAT WAS THAT THING?"

Fate smirked again. "The Demogorgon. Told you that stuff was important. And that this whole thing is pretty much a DnD game. It's pretty interesting, actually, that DnD becomes such a metaphor for the whole thing. Even the campaign at the end of Episode Eight; then again, people can overanalyze this kind of thing."

The camera shows a child's drawing on a wall.

Hopper's eyes widened.

The camera pans across a messy trailer. A TV is playing a news station. "... reports of surges and outages across the county... we reached out to Roane County Water and Electric, and..."

The camera shows Hopper sprawled on his couch. He wakes up. The camera cuts to a porch, where Hopper is smoking. It cuts to a shower, then the mirror.

"Why... why are we watching Chief's morning routine?" asked Powell. Fate rolled her eyes. "Again, it's important. Or, well, maybe not, but it's interesting."

The camera shows Hopper dressing. Then it pans to the TV. "... in other news, it seems like you may want to stay in tonight- or pack an umbrella. Let's go now to everyone's favorite morning weatherman, Charles. Charles?"

The door closes.

The camera cuts to the kitchen of the Byers house. Jonathan is cooking breakfast. Joyce's voice rings out. "Where the hell are they? Dammit!"

Joyce blushed, embarrassed.

"Check the couch." Jonathan advises. Joyce, frazzled, nabs her keys from under a cushion. "Okay, I've got to go, goodbye- wait. Where's Will?"

"Oh, he's probably still sleeping. I haven't gotten him up yet."

"You gotta make sure he's up, Jonathan, how many times-" Joyce sounds exasperated.

"I'm making breakfast!" Jonathan protests. Joyce shakes her head and hurries down the hall, clapping her hands.

"Will, honey, come on, time to get up." She opens Will's bedroom door. His room is, unsurprisingly, empty. She hurries back over to Jonathan, looking worried.

"He came home last night, right?"

"He's not in his room?"

"Did he come home or not?"

"I don't know."

*"You **don't know?**"*

Jonathan blinks. "I got back late, I was working-"

"You were working?"

"Eric asked if I could cover for him. I said yeah; I figured we could use the cash."

The whole Byers family cringed at this airing of their family's monetary issues.

"We talked about this. I told you not to take shifts when I'm working; someone needs to be home for him." Joyce says.

"He was over at the Wheelers' all day, I'm sure he just stayed over."

"I wish." Mike muttered.

"I can't believe this." Mutters Joyce.

"I'm sorry-"

*"I **can't** believe this." Joyce grabs the phone and dials. The camera cuts to the Wheeler kitchen.*

Mike is grabbing syrup, Nancy is eating scrambled eggs, Holly is crying, and Ted is watching the news.

The phone rings and Karen answers. "Hello?"

"Karen- it's Joyce."

"Joyce, hi-"

Nancy watches Mike pour syrup on his scrambled eggs. "That's disgusting."

"You're disgusting." Mike retorts, pouring syrup on her eggs.

*"Mike, what the **hell?**" Nancy shouts.*

"Hey, language." Ted says, clearly not paying attention.

"Quiet!" Karen shouts to the kids. "I'm sorry, one of those mornings." She tells Joyce.

"Was that Will I heard back there?"

"Will? No, no. Just Michael."

"Will didn't spend the night?"

"No... he left here a little after eight. He's not home?" Karen looks worried now.

Joyce tries to calm down. "I- no- he must have just left early for school. Thanks, Karen."

She hangs up and looks at Jonathan, both worried.

The cameras cut to Mike, Lucas, and Dustin riding past the high school toward Hawkins Middle School.

They put their bikes in the bike rack, looking around.

"I don't see him. Weird." Mike says.

"I'm telling you, his mom's right. He just went to class early again." Lucas says.

"Yeah, he's always paranoid Gursky's gonna give him another pop quiz." Dustin says. Mike nods.

"So not the case." Dustin mumbled.

Troy's voice rings out. "Step right up, ladies and gentlemen! Step right up and get your tickets for the **freak show!**"

James and Troy head toward the boys. They don't move, staying where they are.

"Mouthbreathers." Muttered El.

Troy looks at them all, then speaks. "Who do you think would make more money at a freak show? 'Midnight', 'Frogface', or 'Toothless'?" He hits Lucas, Mike, and Dustin, one at a time.

Fate muttered darkly. Her audience caught a few words here and there- "idiots", "uncreative" "slimy worms", "scum from the bottom of the barrel of scum", "jerks", "cowards", "fools", "evil", "arseholes", "screw them".

"We are not cowards!" yelled Troy.

"Mmhmm." Fate said coldly. "Right. You totally didn't run away when a little girl threatened you."

Troy sputtered soundlessly.

James speaks now. "Hmm. I'd have to go with-" he mimics Dustin's lisp- "Toothless."

*Dustin glares. "I told you a million times, my teeth are coming in, it's called **cleidocranial dysplasia**."*

*James mocks him. "I told you a **million times**-"*

"Do the arm thing." Troy butts in. Dustin hesitates. James speaks now. "Do it, freak."

Claudia looked to be on the verge of smacking the two bullies.

Dustin relents. Troy and James exchange disgusted looks and shudder. "Ugh, it gets me every time. Every time!" They shove past the boys and leave, laughing.

Lucas mutters under his breath. "Numbskulls."

Mike turns to Dustin. "I think it's cool. It's like a superpower, like Mr. Fantastic."

Dustin shrugs. "Yeah, except I can't fight evil with it."

The boys grab their backpacks and head into the school. The camera cuts to the high school, and Nancy, walking into the school.

"Ugh, why is there so much focus on Miss Perfect and her lame brother?" asked Carol.

"A better question is, why was Steve friends with you for so long?" asked Fate. "I mean, I'm genuinely curious."

Steve shrugged when her inquiring gaze fell on him.

Barb hustles through the crowd and catches up to Nancy. "So? Did he call?"

Nancy smiled sadly.

"Keep your voice down." Nancy hisses.

"Did he?" Barb repeats. Nancy shakes her head and opens her locker. "I told you, it's not like that."

*Barb gives her a **look**.*

*Nancy relents. "Okay, I mean, yes, fine, he likes me, you know, but not like **that**. We just... made out a few times."*

Nancy groaned and covered her face, a hot blush covering her cheeks.

"When are we going to get back to something interesting?" demanded Troy.

Barb smirks. "'We just made out a few times'. Nance, I'm serious, you're going to be so cool now it's ridiculous."

"No, I'm not!" Nancy protests.

*"You better still hang out with me, is all I'm saying. If you become friends with **Carol and Tommy H-**"*

*"Gross. And I'm telling you, this was just a one-time... okay, **two-time** thing, alright?"*

She stops, pulling out a note, reading MEET ME. BATHROOM. STEVE. Barb raises an eyebrow. "You were saying?"

The scene goes black and mute.

"What?" said Carol, now looking confused.

"I told you, I'm gonna black and mute stuff." Fate sighed. "It's gross watching people make out."

"Oh, eww." Muttered Mike, making a face. Nancy reached over and hit him.

The scene cuts to the Police Station. Hopper's car is pulling into the lot. He walks inside, smoking.

"Good of you to show." Flo snaps from behind the partition.

"Mornin' to you too, Flo." Hopper responds.

He heads for the coffee machine.

"Mornin', Chief." Says Powell.

"Damn, you look like hell, Chief." Says Callahan.

"Well, I look better than your wife did when I left her this morning." Hopper drawls. Powell laughs.

Flo nabs Hopper's cigarette and stubs it. "While you were drinking, or sleeping, or whatever it is you deem so important, Phil Larson called, said some kids stole the gnomes out of his garden again."

"Gnomes again, huh?" Hopper comments. "Well, tell Phil I'll get right on that." He walks towards his office, lighting another cigarette. Flo follows.

"On a more pressing matter, Joyce Byers can't find her son this morning."

"Yeah, alright, I'll give her a call. Just give me a minute-"

Flo scowls. "Chief, Joyce is very upset and-"

"What have I told you? Morning is for coffee and contemplation."

"Chief, she's-"

"Coffee and contemplation, Flo!"

"Hop..." sighed Joyce, looking somewhat aggravated.

"I know, I know." Hopper snapped.

The scene cuts to the inside of his office, with Joyce already inside, a cigarette in hand.

The camera shows the police report, and the word forming: MISSING.

"I've been waiting in here for an hour." Joyce says, pacing.

"And I apologize again-" Hopper starts.

Joyce cuts him off. "An **hour**."

"I understand. But, boy his age, he's probably playing hooky-"

"Eew." Will mumbled, making a face.

"Not my Will, no. He wouldn't do that. He's not like that." Joyce says immediately. Hopper leans back.

"You never know. My mother though I was on the debate team, when really I was screwing Chrissy Carpenter in the back of my dad's car."

"Eew, Dad." Whispered El, making a face and full use of a vocabulary word she had learned from Max. Hopper sighed and rolled his eyes.

"Will's not like you. He's not like me. He not like... most." Joyce says.
"He's got a couple of friends. But the other kids, they make fun of him. Call him names, laugh at him, his clothes-"

Will cringed.

"His clothes? What's wrong with his clothes?" Hopper asks.

"And that's the part he focuses on." Laughed Fate.

"I don't know. Does it matter?"

"Maybe."

The screen goes black briefly.

Hopper scratches his chin. "You hear from Lonnie lately?"

Joyce hesitates. "He was in Indianapolis last I heard, about a year ago. But he's got nothing to do with this."

Hopper grabs a pen and notepad. "What's his number?"

"I told you, he's got nothing to do with this-"

"Kid goes missing, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, kid's with a parent or relative."

"What about the other time?"

Fate grinned. "They get kidnapped by an extradimen- oh, frick, can't say that, spoilers."

Several people glared at her in frustration.

"What?" Hopper says, startled.

"You said, 'ninety-nine out of a hundred'. What about the other time? The one."

Hopper leans forward. "This is Hawkins, Joyce. In the four years I've been police chief, you know the worst thing that's happened?"

Fate cracked up. "Bet that's changed! Bet it has!"

Everyone stared at her, confused.

"It was when an owl attacked Eleanor Gillespie. It thought her hair was a nest."

Joyce sighs. "I'll call Lonnie. He'll talk to me before he talks to a-

"A pig?"

*"A **cop**." Joyce sits down. "Just find my son, Hop. **Find him.**"*

The scene cuts to Hawkins Lab. Black sedans drive up, stop, and discharge men in black suits. A white-haired man greets them. "Welcome, gentlemen."

"Wait, Hopper does find Will, doesn't he?" asked Mr. Clarke.

"Yes, but it's a long, complicated process taking an entire week, during which- well, bad stuff. And it's a process that that bastard Dr. Brenner could have easily shortened, but nooooo, he had to keep stupid secrets and try to cover things up and let people die. Argh. It's stuff like that that makes my job so much harder." Grumbled Fate.

"What is your job?" asked Powell.

"It's right in the name, isn't it?" Fate chirped. "I have to manage the balance of good and bad, which means that people like Brenner make my job so very difficult. When good people die, I have to figure out what makes it better. 'Course, it's worse when I have to let good people die because too much good stuff has happened."

"Too much good stuff?" questioned Hopper doubtfully.

She nodded and sighed. "When good stuff happens, anywhere, I have to be able to balance it out, somewhere. My job stinks."

The men walk through the hallway with Dr. Brenner. Scientists rush around, clearly worried. One scientist rushes up to the men. "We've evacuated the east wing- sealed it off, following quarantine protocol-"

"Quarantine protocol?" asked Powell. "There something no one told us?"

They arrive at a plastic quarantine door. Brenner unzips it. The men walk in and get into hazmat suits. The camera cuts to the elevator. Brenner, the scientist who'd spoken before, the agents, and soldiers armed with M16-like rifles with barrel-mounted flashlights. All riding down into the lab. One agent looks up at the ceiling. The elevator stops, and the doors open.

The group exits into the dark corridor, much transformed. The lights are dead. White fog clouds the air. Snowflake-like spores dance in to air. Cracks in the cement.

"What the heck?" muttered the high school science teacher.

"The place is dying." Murmured Fate serenely.

The men enter the lab and look around. The far wall is illuminated. Fleshy growths cover the wall. There is an opening in the center, around twelve

feet in diameter. It is undulating, pulsing. Like a heart.

"What the hell?" multiple people exclaimed, while El looked down, unhappy.

"Hey," Dustin nudged her. "It's kinda cool, actually." She smiled hesitantly, while others looked at Dustin like he was nuts.

"This is where it came from?" asks the lead agent. Brenner nods. "And the girl?" the agent asks.

"Girl?" asked Callahan.

"She can't have gone far." Brenner responds. The camera pans to an isolation tank with a clear viewing window. Empty. Haunting.

"Right, right." Mumbled Fate. "Here we go, we finally meet her."

"Is that an isolation tank?" Mr. Clarke suddenly glanced over at Dustin, remembering a certain phone call.

"Ye-e-es." Replied Fate, rather evasively.

The screen shows two bare feet stepping onto grass. The camera pans up to show a child, wearing a filthy hospital gown. Her face is smudged, her hair shaved.

"What?" questioned several people at once. "Who-what-huh?"

The girl stares at a restaurant. BENNY'S BURGERS AND ICE CREAM.

Benny emerges from a side door and dumps trash.

He heads back in, and the girl slips in after him. She watches him bring someone burgers and fries. Earl speaks now. "Benny, how about Kellogg last night?"

"Oh, yeah, oh yeah." Says Benny.

"He's gonna win us the championship, I just know." Says Earl.

Benny shrugs, "Eh, if we hadn't traded English-"

"Don't get me started on that, too damn early." Earl replies.

The girl sneaks into the kitchen. She steps over to a basket of French fries. She picks one up, staring at it like she's never seen one before. She eats it, then starts eating more. Benny spots her. "Hey!"

She grabs the basket and runs, through the swinging doors and into the back storage room, where Benny catches her. "Think you can steal from me, boy?" He stops, confused, as the girl tries to break free. "Girl, what in the hell?"

She stares at him, then the scene cuts to Hawkins Middle School.

"What?" someone asked.

A bell rings, and Mr. Clarke's class rushes out as he calls after them: "Remember, finish Chapter Twelve, and answer twelve-point-three on the difference between experiment and other forms of science investigation..." he trails off, as most of the class has left.

"Did it come?" Mike asks excitedly. Lucas and Dustin join him in front of Mr. Clarke's desk. Mr. Clarke gives them a sad look. "Sorry, boys, hate to be the bearer of bad news, but..."

The boys droop.

"It came!" Mr. Clarke tells them.

The camera cuts to the AV Club room. The door bursts open and the boys race in, followed by Mr. Clarke.

"The Heathkit ham shack. Ain't she a beaut?" he says.

The boys examine the radio, excited.

"I didn't know it ever came!" Will grumbled. "What happened to it?"

"Well-" started Dustin awkwardly. Several teachers frowned at him, but Fate swooped in. "It was sacrificed in the name of saving lives-well- one life. Okay, it died in the service of a good cause, let's put it like that."

"A good cause?" demanded the principal. "What good cause?"

Fate sighed. "You'll see in Chapter Four: The Body."

Dustin speaks. "I bet you can talk to New York on this thing!"

"Think bigger." Mr. Clarke replies.

Lucas says, "California?"

"Bigger." Mr. Clarke says.

Mike speaks up. "Australia?" Mr. Clarke nods.

The boys look shocked.

And excited.

Lucas grins. "Oh man. When Will sees this he's going to totally blow his shit-"

"Lucas." Mr. Clarke says.

"Sorry."

Lucas starts working the dials. Mike grabs the transceiver, and speaks(in a bad Australian accent): "Ello, this is Mike Wheeler, President of Hawkins Middle AV Club-" Dustin grabs the headset and speaks in an even worse accent: "Ello, this is Dustin Henderson, Secretary and Treasurer of Hawkins Middle AV Club. Do you eat kangaroos for breakfast?"

"Dustin, Mike," laughed the other Party members. Neither Dustin nor Mike seemed remotely abashed, just grinning.

A knock sounds at the door. The principal is here with Hopper and Callahan. He speaks. "Sorry to interrupt, but may I borrow Michael, Lucas, and Dustin?"

The camera cuts to the three boys, looking at one another in confusion.

The scene cuts to the principal's office, where all three boys are speaking at once.

"Whoa, whoa, **whoa**." Hopper cuts in. "One at a time." He points at Mike. "You. You said he takes what?"

"Mirkwood." Mike answers.

Hopper scowls. "Mirkwood?" He turns to Callahan. "You ever heard of Mirkwood?"

"I have not. It sounds made up to me."

Lucas interjects. "It's from Lord of the Rings-"

"The Hobbit-" interrupts Dustin. "It doesn't matter!" Lucas responds.

"He asked!" Dustin says. Lucas mimics him. "'He asked'."

The two boys jostle each other, attempting to hit one another. Mike sits in the middle with an exasperated look on his face.

"Why- why exactly did you sit in the middle? I've been here for three months and I know not to sit there." Max said to Mike. He shrugged. "Normally, Will and I would both sit in the middle and that would keep them from actually hitting each other."

"Oh."

"Hey!" shouts Hopper. "What'd I just say? One at a **damn time**." He points at Mike again.

"Mirkwood. It's a real road, it's just the name that's made up. It's where Cornwallis and Kerley meet."

"Okay. I think I know it."

"We can show you-" Mike starts.

"I said I know it." Hopper snaps.

"We could help look!" Mike says.

"No. After school, you all go straight home. That means no biking around, looking for your friend, no investigating, no nonsense. This isn't some 'Lord of the Rings' book-"

"The Hobbit." Dustin corrects. Hopper glares.

"Do I make myself clear?" he growls.

"Probably not clear enough." Chirped Fate. "Given how they- uh, dammit, spoilers again. Oops. Whatever."

The boys all nod.

The camera cuts to a slightly brighter, washed out scene, with unnatural hints of blurriness at the edges. Joyce is walking through the woods, looking happy.

"What-" someone started.

"Oh, it's a flashback." Said Fate casually. "There's lots of them. They show the full story- well, some of them do. This one just makes it more emotionally charged."

The camera pans to reveal her destination. A fort made out of sticks and tarp. A sign reads CASTLE BYERS.

Will smiles slightly, remembering hiding there during his time in the Upside Down.

Joyce kneels by the entrance. "Ring-a-ding! Anybody home?"

Will's voice rings out from inside. "Password?"

Joyce speaks. "Rad-fast- no, Rhada- Rhadagast?"

"You may enter." Will responds.

Joyce enters. "I got off early today-" she sits next to Will. "And guess what?" she pulls out a pair of tickets. "Poltergeist!"

Will looks excited. "I thought I wasn't allowed?"

"I changed my mind." Joyce responds. "But if you have nightmares-"

"I won't, I don't get scared like that anymore."

Will shook his head a little, frowning. The other Party members all

hugged him.

"Not even by clowns?"

"No-"

"What about my witch?"

"Mom!" Will laughs as his mother starts tickling him.

The scene abruptly cuts to a still, silent, empty Castle Byers. Joyce retreats, leaving the fort, her face desperate.

"Will? Will!" Jonathan shouts outside the fort.

Joyce joins him. "Will! Will!"

Only silence responds.

Several people sent the Byers pitying looks. They ignored them

The scene cuts to a hamburger patty hitting the broiler. Benny is tending it. He glances up at the girl.

The camera cuts to him placing the burger and fries in front of her. There is no one else there. She now wears an oversized BENNY'S BURGERS shirt.

She begins eating. Benny watches a moment, then speaks. "Your parents forget to feed you?"

She keeps eating.

"That's so rude." Said Flo. El blushed, embarrassed, and Mike hugged her. "It's okay, you didn't know." He murmured. She smiled.

"That why you ran away?" Benny asks. She still doesn't respond. "They, they hurt you? And... you went to the hospital, that it? But you got scared, ran off, found your way here?"

She pauses, looks up at him. Then goes back to eating. Benny hesitates, come to a decision. He pulls away the plate. She freezes and looks up at him.

"Okay, here's how it's gonna go. I'll give this back, and you can have as much as you like, maybe even some ice cream. But first, you gotta answer a few of my questions. We got a deal?"

She stares at him.

"We'll start easy. My name's Benny. Benny Hammond." He holds out his hand, then takes hers, and shakes. She tenses.

"Nice to meet ya. And you are...?"

She doesn't respond. He sighs, starts to withdraw his hand. He notices a small tattoo. The camera cuts closer. It reads 011 in simple black lettering.

"A tattoo?" asked Carol. "What kinda freak has a tattoo like that?"

El flinched and rubbed her arm. The Party all glared at Carol, who didn't notice.

Fate frowned. "Be nice. Or someday you'll say something to the wrong person. And they won't appreciate it at all." Her tone held a hint of anger.

"Eleven?" asks Benny. She yanks her hand away.

"What's that mean?" he asks.

"No." she says.

"Well, I'll be damned. She speaks." He paused. "No? No what?" she doesn't respond.

Benny sighs. "Alright, guess 'no' more food then." He starts to move away with the food.

"Eleven!" she says quickly. Benny turns. "Eleven. Yeah. What's it mean?"

She hesitates, points to herself. "Eleven."

"That's her name?" asked Claudia, looking worried now.

"Yeah, well, sort of." Said Fate.

Benny is now on the phone in the kitchen, speaking softly. "All I know is, she's scared to death... yeah, I think she's been abused or kidnapped or something." He pauses. "It's 4819 Randolph Lane. Randolph, right. R-A-N-"

Eleven is finishing her fries. A soft noise repeats in the background. She looks up at an old fan, squeaking with every turn. Eleven stares at it, eyes narrowing. Intent. The fan blades stop. She looks down at her fries, content now.

"How did-did the fan break?" asked Mr. Clarke, confused.

"No." Fate said innocently.

"Then what-"

"Spoilers!" she singsonged.

Several people twitched, suspecting that that was going to become quite annoying.

The scene cuts to two police cars speeding down the street.

Then cuts to Hopper walking down the road, eyes sweeping from side to side. Behind him, Callahan and Powell call out. "Will Byers? WILL BYERS?!"

Hopper pulls a vial out of his pocket and pops two pills. His eyes narrow and he moves off the road.

"Hey, I got something here." He calls to Callahan and Powell. He kneels by Will's bike. Callahan and Powell race over.

"That his bike, Chief?" asks Callahan. Hopper nods. "Looks like he crashed." Hopper says.

"Maybe he got hurt in the fall." Callahan says.

"I did, actually. I scraped my hands pretty badly." Will said, slowing as he realized- "I was bleeding..."

"Oh, Jesus." Muttered Dustin.

Others looked on in confusion, while Jonathan and Nancy rubbed their matched scars.

"Not so hurt he couldn't make it home. And a bike like this is like a Cadillac to these kids. He woulda walked it home."

The scene cuts to a large radar dish. Then cuts to a line of agents, sitting, listening to radios.

Voices can be heard: "... going to the store..." "... be home by..." "... meeting with Tom in ten..."

"They were listening to us?" someone shouted. "What the hell!"

Other people echoed that outrage.

"Hush." Fate scolded softly. "Listen."

The screen shows one agent, and a familiar voice rings out.

"Lonnie. It's Joyce-"

"Lonnie isn't here right now."

The scene cuts to the Byers kitchen. "Who is this? Who are you? This is Joyce- Lonnie's ex-wife. I need to speak to him- now- no not later-" a click is heard. Joyce explodes. "Bitch!" she slams the phone down.

Jonathan, working on a MISSING poster in the living room, calls out. "Mom, you need to stay calm."

"I'm calm." Joyce says.

She dials again. No one answers. It goes to message.

"Hey, you've reached Lonnie, I'm not here at the moment but..."

Joyce glares at the phone and speaks: "Lonnie, some teenager just hung up on me. Will's missing and I need you to call me back." She slams the phone down.

Jonathan rises, looking out the window. "Mom."

"What?"

"Cops."

Joyce explodes out onto the porch, with Jonathan following. Hopper carries Will's bike over.

Inside the house, Joyce asks, "And it was just sitting there?"

"Yes." *Hopper answers.*

"Was there any blood or-?"

"No, no."

Jonathan butts in. "If you found his bike out there, why're you here?"

"He's got a key to the house, right?" *Hopper says.*

"Yeah-" *Jonathan answers.*

"So maybe he came back here." *Hopper says.*

"Yes, he did." *Chirped Fate. "You just won't find him there."*

"So- what? You think I haven't checked my own house?" *Joyce demands.*

Hopper nods. "Never said you didn't." He inspects the back door, where a dent resides in the wall. He opens the door. Its handle aligns perfectly with the dent.

"This always been here?" *he asks.*

"No." *mumbled Joyce.*

"Probably. I've got two boys, look at this place." *Joyce replies.*

Hopper exits the house. They hear whimpering. Chester is pacing in front of the shed, whimpering.

"You know, I was worried about him." *Murmured Will softly. "He was in the house... I thought it might've gotten him."*

"What's up with you, buddy?" Hopper crouches and pets Chester, who barks.

"Oh, he's probably just hungry- come on..." Joyce grabs Chester's collar and leads him to the house.

Hopper straightens and looks toward the shed.

Hopper walks into the shed. He flips the light switch and looks around. He sees the empty rifle mount and the scattered ammunition.

"Oh, that's- noticeable..." muttered Mike, glancing at Will. "Why did everyone automatically believe you'd somehow ended up at the quarry?" he winced as he said it, knowing that he had.

The lightbulb flickers. Hopper looks up at it. It goes out. Hopper fumbles for a flashlight, and shines it on a broken box. The box is slimy with mold.

Footsteps sound. Hopper turns, shining the light on- Callahan.

Several people let out relieved breaths.

"I'm all spooked now..." murmured Jennifer Hayes.

"You deaf? I've been calling you." Callahan says. The lightbulb flickers back on. Hopper and Callahan exit the shed.

"I want you to call Florence, have get a search party together, as many volunteers as she can muster- have them bring flashlights, too."

"You think we got a problem here?" Callahan asks.

"We did." Muttered Hopper.

"Yeah." Fate sounded unusually somber. "You did. You know, any longer there and he would've died."

Most people looked confused, but the PartyPlus understood immediately. Mike wrapped both arms around Will, tense.

Fate nodded. "He did, actually- but I have pull with Death. And so, Death does the occasional favor for me. That was one of them."

Joyce's mouth opened, and she silently mouthed, 'thank you'. Fate just smiled.

The scene cuts to a neighborhood. Mike's voice sounds.

"We should be out there. We should be helping look for him."

The camera cuts to the Wheeler dining room.

"No, you should not." Snapped Karen.

Mike isn't eating, unlike the rest of his family.

Karen speaks now. "We've been over this. The chief said-"

"I don't care what the chief said." Mike snaps.

*"**Michael.**" Karen says.*

"We have to do something- Will could be in danger!" Mike says.

Karen snaps, "More reason to stay put."

"Mom-" starts Mike. Karen frowns at him. "End. Of. Discussion." She snaps.

Mike looks away. The family sits in silence. Nancy isn't eating now, just moving her food around with her fork.

"So... me and Barb are gonna study for the chemistry test at her house tonight." She is clearly trying to sound casual. "That's cool... right?"

"No. Not cool." Karen replies.

"What?" Nancy says. "Why not?"

"Why do you think? Am I speaking Chinese in this house?" Karen says. "Until we know Will's okay, no on leaves."

"That didn't really do much." Laughed Fate. "Didn't stop anyone leaving- well, except for Holly."

Karen frowned in her direction, then frowned at her children.

"This is such bullshit!" Nancy yells.

"Language!" Ted snaps.

"Um... Will... I apologize in advance." Nancy said nervously. Will nodded, confused. Mike scowled at his sister, angry, and clearly not happy about her apology.

"Just because Mike's friend got lost on the way home-" Nancy continues.

"So this is Will's fault now?!" Mike demands.

"Nancy, take that back!" Karen snaps.

"No!" Nancy shouts.

Fate spoke. "This may be slightly embarrassing, but I like it." She shrugged.

Mike scowls angrily and spits, "You're just mad 'cause you wanna hang out with Steve!"

"Who is Steve?" questions Karen.

*Mike looks at his mother. "Her new **boyfriend**-"*

"You are such a douche, Mike!" Nancy exclaims.

"I'm still not sorry." Mike mumbled.

"Language!" Ted snaps again.

Nancy storms off, heading upstairs. Karen calls after her: "Nancy! Come back! NANCY!"

Karen picks up a crying Holly, looking torn. "There, there, it's okay, Holly..." she murmurs.

"You see, Michael. You see what happens?" Ted turns to Mike, who immediately responds.

"What happens when what? I'm the only one acting normal here- I'm the only one who cares about Will!"

Ted responds through a mouthful of chicken. "That's unfair, son. We care."

Mike moves to respond, stops, then throws his hands up and storms off. Karen glares at Ted. "I hope you're enjoying your chicken, Ted." She leaves with Holly.

Ted calls after her; "Hey! What'd I do? What'd I doooooo?"

Karen cringed with embarrassment.

The scene cuts to the dark woods, where Hopper is walking near the front of the search party.

"That's a lot of people..." Will noticed, voice soft.

Mr. Clarke comes up next to Hopper. "He's a good student."

"Huh?" Hopper responds.

"Will. He's a good student. A great one, actually."

"Thanks, Mr. Clarke..." Will trailed off awkwardly.

Mr. Clarke offers his hand to Hopper. "I don't think we've met. Scott Clarke. I teach at Hawkins Middle. Earth and Biology."

Hopper shakes his hand. "Always had a distaste for science."

"Maybe you had a bad teacher."

"Yeah, Ms. Ratliff was a nasty piece of work."

"Ratliff? You bet. She's still kicking around, believe it or not."

"Oh, I believe it. Mummies never die, or so they tell me."

The conversation tapers off briefly.

"Sara, my daughter. Galaxies, the universe, whatnot. She always understood that stuff. I always figured, there's enough down here. Don't need to go lookin' elsewhere." Hopper says.

"Your daughter. What grade is she? Maybe I'll get her in my class."

Fate laughed. "Different daughter, but you did get one of his daughters in your class. Granted, an adoptive one, but what difference does that really make?"

"Oh, uh, she lives in the city. With her mother."

"Oh."

Hopper walks away. "Thanks for coming out, teach. Appreciate it." He calls over his shoulder.

A nearby woman whispers to Mr. Clarke; "She died a few years back."

"Sorry?" Mr. Clarke says.

"His daughter."

Mr. Clarke looks over to Hopper.

The camera cuts to the Wheelers' basement. The Demogorgon figurine is the focus, at first, before it pulls back to show Mike lying by the board. He stares at the figurines scattered across the board.

He moves to the table, and picks up his Supercomm. "Lucas? It's Mike. You copy? Lucas?"

"Hey, it's Lucas." Lucas' voice crackles over the walkie.

"I know it's you. And say 'over' when you're done talking or I don't know you're done. Over."

"Aah, nerd etiquette for Supercomms." Said Steve, smirking. "I remember getting lectured on that."

Dustin rolled his eyes. "You can't communicate if the other person is holding down their button, so you have to say 'over' to make sure they know you're done."

"We all know." Singsonged Fate.

The camera cut to Lucas in his room. He says exaggeratedly "I'm done."

Over."

"I'm worried about Will. Over."

Lucas rolls over. "Yeah. This is crazy. Over."

"I was thinking... Will could've cast Protection last night. But he didn't. He cast Fireball. Over."

"What's your point? Over."

"My point is... he could've played it safe. But he didn't. He put himself in danger to help the Party. Over."

"And that, right there." Fate said. "That is going to be incredibly important in Season Two, specifically in Episode Eight and Episode Nine."

"What?" asked a confused Callahan. "It's just a kid trying to read too much into a situation."

"Is it?" asked Fate. "Or is it someone reading a situation pretty well? And as for the whole 'going to be important in Season Two, I was referring specifically to 'he put himself in danger to help the Party'. That's gonna be important, just wait."

"Yeah." Mike muttered, lightly smacking Will's arm.

A moment passes. Then Lucas seems to come to a decision. "Meet me in ten. Over and out." He slides the antennae on his Supercomm down.

The scene cuts to Mike jamming flashlights into his backpack.

"Michael!/Lucas!" shouted Karen and Mrs. Sinclair at the same time, while Claudia looked at Dustin, who squirmed.

"Weeell, I love this upcoming scene, but I think I'll black it." Fate said calmly. "Don't wanna get anyone in trouble, after all. More trouble than necessary, that is."

The scene cuts to Benny washing dishes. Eleven is sitting on a counter, eating ice cream.

"You like that ice cream, huh?" Benny asks.

Eleven looks up and smiles. Benny turns off the faucet. "Smile looks good on ya."

Eleven's smiles fades and she gives him a confused look.

He blinks. "Yeah. You know, a smile?" he gives a big smile. She smiles back. A knock sounds at the door, and she tenses, smile fading again. Benny looks over, than says, "You stay put, okay? Whoever it is, I'll just turn 'em away real quick."

Eleven watches while he walks to the door.

A blonde woman is waiting. "Benny Hammond?" she asks as the door swings open.

"fraid so. Also 'fraid we're closed for the night. Why don't you try back tomorrow?"

The woman extends a hand. "Connie Frazier. Social Services."

Benny opens the door back up.

Fate shook her head slowly.

"Didn't think you'd make it here so fast. Heck of a drive." He says.

"Not so bad this time of night." She replies.

"Listen, I, uh, haven't told her you were coming. Didn't want to scare her off, you know... she's a tad skittish."

"Children I work with usually are." Connie smiles brightly, looking around. "So... where is she?"

"In the kitchen." Benny responds, turning. "Sorry again for trying to turn you away. You know, your voice sounds different on the phone-"

She raises a pistol and fires. He falls.

"My mom was pretty upset when we watched this." Remarked Fate.

"Social Services wouldn't-" started Powell.

"She's not Social Services." Interrupted Fate. "She's one of the bad men."

"The bad men?" asked Mr. Clarke, confused.

Eleven leaps to her feet, dropping the ice cream and running into the storage room. Two men block her. She stares, cornered.

"Oh-" Jennifer covered her eyes, having noticed the guns.

"They're just stun guns." Fate said. "And I wouldn't worry about Eleven. She can take care of herself."

The camera zooms on Eleven.

Then cuts to Brenner walking into the building, looking at Benny, then moving quickly into the storage room. Both agents are lying broken on the ground, heads bleeding.

Dr. Brenner steps hastily out the back door, but Eleven... is gone.

"What the hell?" exclaimed Callahan.

"What happened to them?" someone asked.

Fate smiled mysteriously. "You won't find out for a little while. Episode Three I think."

The scene cuts to Mirkwood. The boys are biking down it. Mike slows to a stop by the police barrier, with Lucas and Dustin following.

They get off their bikes. Mike and Lucas start for the police barrier. Dustin hesitates. "You guys feel that?" he holds out his hand, rain hitting his palm. "Maybe we should go back."

Mike glares and ducks under the barrier, calling, "Stay on Channel Six and don't do anything stupid." Lucas follows him under the barrier.

Dustin hesitates- then runs after them. "Hey, guys, wait up! Wait up!"

"Dustin." His mother scolded.

He squirmed again.

The screen cuts to blackness and silence for several minutes.

Someone coughed impatiently.

"What?" asked Fate innocently. "I don't wanna get anyone in trouble."

The screen lit up with Jonathan and Joyce making a MISSING poster. They are flipping through a folder of photos Jonathan had taken.

"These are great, Jonathan." Joyce murmurs. Jonathan doesn't respond. Joyce continues. "I've been working so much lately, I feel like I barely know what's going on with you anymore."

She looks up. Jonathan is fighting tears. "What is it, honey?"

"Nothing."

"What is it?"

"It's just... I should've been here for him. He was probably so scared... I should've been here."

"It would have done absolutely nothing." Fate said firmly.

"Hey. Hey, you can't do that to yourself, baby. This wasn't your fault." Joyce says. Jonathan nods.

Joyce turns back to the pictures. "Oh, how about this one? I always liked this one..." she picks up a picture of Will at the park.

"...Me too." Jonathan says softly.

The phone rings.

"Ugh, talk about boring." Grumbled Carol.

"This part isn't boring." Fate replied.

Joyce and Jonathan look up, and Joyce moves to the phone. "Yes... hello?"

No one answers. The sound of breathing can be heard.

"Lonnie...? Hopper...?"

The Party came to a sudden realization, and all moved automatically to curl around Will again.

No answer.

"Who is this?" Joyce asks.

Jonathan stands up.

The breathing gets louder. It sounds like a child's breathing. Joyce stiffens. "Will? Will?!"

*Jonathan rushes over. Joyce continues to speak. "Where are you, baby? Talk to me! Will? **Will?!"***

The breathing is replaced by a harsh, guttural growl. An inhuman sound.

"What the hell is that?" asked Mr. Sinclair. No one responded.

"How did you know it was Will?" asked Karen. Joyce frowned. "I just knew."

"Who is this? What have you done with my baby? What have you done?!" Joyce demands. Silence, then a high-pitched shriek erupts from the receiver. Joyce drops the phone with a gasp of pain. Jonathan grabs the phone. "Who is this?! WHO IS THIS?!"

The phone line is dead. No one responds. And the phone is fried.

"How did the phone end up fried?" wondered Mr. Clarke. Nothing about this really made sense to the scientific-minded man.

Fate sighed. "Connections to another re- uh, shoot. Spoilers. But connections like that- they never last long. Only when it is nearby. And electronics don't last long."

Spoilers. More than a few people grumbled when she said this.

The scene changes to the wet, dark, woods. Mike shouts, "Will? WILL?"

Lucas joins in. "BYERS?!"

Dustin yells, "I've got your X-Men 134!"

Will gave Dustin a highly amused look. "Were you trying to bribe me?"

"Um... no?"

"Guys, I really think we should turn back." Dustin says.

Lucas glares. "Seriously, Dustin, if you want to be a baby, just go home already."

"I'm just being realistic, Lucas-"

"No, you're being a sissy."

"You ever think Will went missing because, you know, he ran into something bad? And we're going to the exact spot he disappeared from, and we don't have any weapons or anything?" Dustin says.

"Dustin, shut up-" says Mike.

"I'm just saying-"

"Shut up!" Mike snaps.

He's not mad. He's listening.

"You guys hear that?"

The sound of rustling foliage can be heard. They swing their flashlights around, then whip in another direction.

The beams land on Eleven, standing soaked to the skin, shaking. She and Mike lock eyes. And...

Credits.

"What?" complained Dustin.

"You know what happens next." Fate pointed out.

"Yeah, but, that's a major cliffhanger." Dustin protested.

2. The Weirdo on Maple Street

"Well, yeah. Questions?" Fate chirped, switching to address the whole room. "You know what, never mind. Next episode: The Weirdo on Maple Street!"

The intro played.

The boys are crowded around Eleven, who is sitting on the couch with Mike's jacket draped over her shoulders. They are all speaking, words tumbling over each other.

"You took her home with you?" Karen asked, exasperated. "How did I not hear about this?"

The boys exchanged looks.

"Is there a number we can call for your parents?" Mike asks.

"Where's your hair? Do you have cancer? Did you run away?" Dustin jumps in.

"Don't be rude," scolded Claudia, causing her son to squirm and blush.

"Are you in some kind of trouble?" Mike asks.

Lucas leans forward. "Is that blood?"

Mike glares at him. "Stop it! You're freaking her out!"

Lucas glares right back. "She's freaking me out!"

Dustin speaks up. "I bet she's deaf." He claps his hands in front of her face. She flinches back. "Not deaf."

Mike steps forward. "All right, that's enough, all right? She's just scared and cold."

Mike moves over to a laundry hamper and grabs some clothes, before walking back to Eleven. "Here, these are clean. Okay?"

Eleven takes the clothes and moves to remove the Benny's Burgers shirt.

El, now understanding what that really meant, blushed. "Oops." she whispered.

"Hey, you had no way of knowing." Lucas pointed out. Fortunately, no one overheard that conversation.

"No, no, no!" Lucas yells. Dustin mumbles, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God."

Mike jumps forward, stopping her. He gestures. "See over there? That's the bathroom. Privacy. Get it?"

Once she's inside, he moves to shut the door. She stops him. "You don't want it closed?" he asks.

Mike winced a little. "Claustrophobic." he muttered. El gave him a curious look. "What's that?"

"Afraid of small spaces." Mike replied.

Eleven replies. "No."

Mike blinks. "Oh, so you can speak. Okay, well- um, how about we just keep the door just like this." He narrows the door. "Is that better?"

Eleven nods. "Yes."

Dustin is pacing. "This is mental."

Mike shrugs. "At least she can talk."

Lucas frowned at him. "She said 'no' and 'yes.' Your three-year-old sister says more."

Lucas winced. "This is gonna be painful. I'm just going to apologize again."

El shrugged.

Dustin adds his two cents. "She tried to get naked."

Lucas says, "There's something seriously wrong with her. Like, wrong in the head." He gestures. "She just went like-" Dustin gestures, knocking his hat off.

Lucas looks at the other two. "I bet she escaped from Pennhurst."

Lucas winced again.

Mike frowns "From where?"

Lucas looks at him. "The nuthouse in Kerley County."

Dustin grins at him. "You got a lot of family there?"

Lucas glares and spits out, "Bite me." He pauses. "Seriously though, think about it. That would explain her shaved hair and why she's so crazy."

Dustin nods. "Why she went like-" he gestures again.

Lucas says, "She's an escapee is the point. She's probably a psycho."

Dustin nods again. "Like Michael Myers."

"Exactly! We should've never brought her here."

Mike frowns. "So you just wanted to leave her out in that storm?"

Lucas nods. "Yes! We went out to find Will, not another problem. I think we should tell your mom."

"I'm sorry." Lucas repeated. El sighed. "You don't have to keep saying it." she smiled at him.

Dustin nods again, energetically. "I second that."

Mike glares. "Who's crazy now?"

"How is that crazy?" Lucas sputters.

"Yes, I'd like to know that as well." Karen crossed her arms.

Mike crosses his arms. "'Cause, we weren't supposed to be out tonight, remember?"

"So?" Lucas snaps.

"So if I tell my mom and she tells your mom and your mom-"

Dustin freezes. "Oh, man."

Lucas shakes his head slowly. "Our houses become Alcatraz."

Mike nods fiercely. "Exactly. We'll never find Will. All right, here's the plan. She sleeps here tonight."

Lucas says, "You're letting a girl-"

Mike cuts him off. "Just listen! In the morning, she sneaks around my house, goes to the front door and rings my doorbell. My mom will answer

and know exactly what to do. She'll send her back to Pennhurst or wherever she comes from. We'll be totally in the clear." he pauses. "And tomorrow night, we go back out. And this time, we find Will."

"I'd like to know what happened to that plan." Karen said, looking at her son. Mike looked down.

"Wait-" Ted frowned. "Isn't she that Russian spy?"

Fate groaned. "Another stupid thing- no, she's not a Russian spy. Of all the stupid excuses..."

Mike carries a bundle over to the blanket fort. "Here you go. This is my sleeping bag."

"You really think she's psycho?" Dustin asks Lucas.

"Not anymore, that's for sure." Lucas said.

El smiled at him. "Are you sure?"

The whole Party laughed.

Lucas walks up the basement stairs. "Wouldn't want her in my house." Dustin shakes his head. "Mental." He walks up the stairs and out.

Mike sits in front of Eleven. "Hey, um, I never asked your name."

She pulls her sleeve up and holds out her arm, showing him her tattoo. He leans forward. "Is that real?"

He reaches forward and she jerks her arm back.

"Sorry, El." Mike said. She blinked at him. "You've already apologized!" she pointed out.

He sits back. "Sorry, I've just never seen a kid with a tattoo before. What's it mean? Eleven?" She points at herself. "That's your name?"

She nods. "Eleven."

Mike shifts. "Okay. Um, well, my name's Mike. Short for Michael." His face brightens. "Maybe we can call you 'El'. Short for Eleven." Eleven nods. "Um, well, okay. 'Night, El." He gets up and moves toward the stairs.

Eleven says, "Night, Mike." He pauses and looks back, then turns off the light and goes up the stairs.

Fate laughed. "That is just adorable." she cooed. Mike and El both blushed.

The scene cuts to the Byers' house.

Jonathan carries a plate over to the table. "All right, Mom. Breakfast is ready."

Joyce looks up. "What?" She reaches out. "No, be careful of the poster."

"Yeah, okay. All right."

"I can't eat."

"I just need you to eat, Mom."

Joyce lifts her hands. "Listen. Listen, the Xerox place opens in, like, 30 minutes."

Jonathan nods. "Yeah."

Joyce speaks again. "And I don't want you to go alone."

Jonathan looks patiently at his mother. "No, I know. I told you, I got it."

"So I'm gonna have Karen take you, 'cause I should be here."

"Okay."

Joyce looks stressed. "We need to make, what, 200, 300 copies? How much is a copy?"

"Yeah, okay. Okay, Mom. Mom."

Joyce fumbles through her wallet. "Ten cents? If we- Ten cents-"

"Mom. Mom. Mom! You can't get like this, okay?"

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"No, it's okay."

Several people shifted uncomfortably at the very personal scene.
The scene cuts to the Byers' living room.

Joyce glares at Hopper. "We've been waiting six hours."

Hopper lifts his hands. "I know. I came as soon as I could."

"Six hours." Joyce hisses.

Hopper tries to placate her. "A little bit of trust here, all right? We've been searching all night. Went all the way to Cartersville."

*"That's a long way." Will observed quietly.
Joyce tenses. "And?"*

Hopper slumps. "Nothing."

"God." Joyce mutters.

Hopper frowns. "Flo says you got a phone call?"

"Oh, yeah." Joyce leads Hopper to the phone. He picks it up. "Storm barbecued this pretty good."

Joyce scowls. "The storm?"

Hopper looks up. "What else?"

Fate smiled. "The connection fried it."

"WHAT CONNECTION?!" demanded at least six people.

Joyce gestures wildly. "You're saying that that's not weird?"

Hopper shakes his head. "No, it's weird."

Jonathan speaks up now. "Can we, like, trace who made the call? Contact the-"

Hopper shakes his head again. "No, it doesn't work like that. Now, uh, you're sure it was Will? Because Flo said you just heard some breathing."

*"No. It was him. It was Will. And he was scared. And then something-"
Joyce trails off.*

Hopper frowns. "It was probably just a prank call, somebody trying to scare you."

"No." Fate shook his head. "That was no prank call."

Joyce sputters: "Who would do that?"

Hopper paces away. "Well, this thing's been on TV. It brings out all the crazies, you know. False leads, prank calls, uh-"

Joyce shakes her head. "No, Hopper, it was not a prank. It was him." she states firmly.

Hopper stares at her. "Joyce."

Joyce gestures again. "Come on, how about a little trust here? What, you think I'm making this up?"

Hopper again tries to placate the angry mother. "I'm not saying that you're making it up. All I'm saying is it's an emotional time for you."

Joyce snaps, "And you think I don't know my own son's breathing? Wouldn't you know your own daughter's?"

"Okay. Okay." Fate sighed. "I know that was a tough time for you, but that was a low blow, Mrs. Byers."

Joyce flinched a little bit.

Hopper turns away, stiffening. "You hear from, uh, Lonnie yet?" he says finally.

Joyce shakes her head. "No."

Hopper puts on his hat. "It's been long enough. I'm having him checked out."

Joyce exclaims, "Oh, come on! You're wasting your time."

Hopper leaves the house and walks toward his car.

Jonathan follows. "Hey, Hopper. Hopper. Let me go."

Hopper turns toward Jonathan. "I'm sorry?"

Jonathan hesitates only briefly. "To Lonnie's. You know, if Will's there, it means he ran away. And if he sees the cops, he'll think he's in trouble."

Jonathan swallows. "He'll- He'll hide. You know, he's good at hiding."

"That probably- no! Definitely saved his life." Fate said.

Hopper frowns again. "Yeah? Well, cops are good at finding." He thumps Jonathan on the chest. "Okay? Stay here with your mom. She needs you."

"He didn't." Fate sighed.

The scene cuts to the Wheeler dining room. Breakfast.

Karen sighs. "Slow down, Mike."

*Nancy scowls at him. "That's disgusting."
Mike frowns back. "Do a lot of studying last night?"*

*Nancy turns away. "Yeah, actually, I did."
"What was your test on again? Human anatomy?" Mike asks, faking innocence.*

"Okay, I'm confused." muttered Stacey.

Fate smiled innocently. "I did say I didn't want to get anyone in trouble with non-necessarily-plot-relevant stuff."

Ted speaks, looking between the two. "Hey, what's going on?"

Nancy and Mike speak in unison: "Nothing."

The scene cuts to the Wheeler basement. Mike walks over to Eleven, who is holding his Supercomm.

Mike smiles. "Hey, you found my supercomm. Pretty cool, huh? I talk to my friends with it. Mostly Lucas, 'cause he lives so close. Signal's pretty weak." He pulls out Eggos. "Got you breakfast."

"So I have you to thank for her obsession?" asked Hopper. Mike cringed. "It was small and portable."

He hesitates. "So listen, this is gonna sound a little weird, but I just need you to go out there. Then go to the front door and ring the doorbell. My mom will answer and you'll tell her that you're lost and that you need help. But whatever you do, you can't tell her about last night or that you know me."

She stills.

Karen was now paying close attention.

He speaks again. "Understand? Really, it's no big deal. We'll just pretend to meet each other again. And my mom, she'll know who to call."

Eleven visibly tenses. "No."

Mike blinks. "No?"

"No." Eleven repeats.

Mike frowns. "No, you don't want my mom to get help? You're in trouble, aren't you?" She nods. He hesitates. "Who- Who are you in trouble with?"

"Bad." Eleven replies.

"Bad?" someone asked, confused. "Wait, the people who killed Benny, right?"

Mike leans forward. "Bad? Bad people? They want to hurt you? The bad people?"

Eleven folds her hand into the shape of a gun, then points it at herself. She slowly shifts her hand toward Mike. "Understand?"

More than a few people were shocked both by the gesture and by the entire circumstance.

Max recognized the gesture; the same one they always used to indicate that there were bad men. It was weird seeing the gesture's origin.

Karen's voice echoes down the stairs. "Michael, where are you? We're going to be late. Let's go!"

Mike jumps, then yells back "All right!" He turns to Eleven. "I'll be back. Just stay here, okay? Stay here."

The scene cuts to the Lab, or, more accurately, the room where agents listen in on the town.

Dr. Brenner is listening to one of the sets. "When was this?" he asks.

"When was what?" asked Karen.

"You'll see." replied Fate.

The agent replies. "Last night. Less than two miles away."

Brenner straightens. "And the boy?"

"Still missing."

Joyce's voice comes over the equipment. "It was my son. I know it. And I-I heard something else. Something else? It was like, uh, some kind of animal. I don't know. Just please tell Hop to hurry."

Joyce blinked, surprised and angered.

Fate nodded slowly. "He knew how- he had the ability to get into the

Upside Down. He waited."

Joyce was now scowling- the whole PartyPlus were. Others remained confused. "The Upside Down?" questioned Mr. Clarke.

The scene cuts to the edge of the woods. People range over the edge of the trees, shouting. "Will!"

"Will Byers!"

"Will Byers!"

"Will!"

"Will!"

"Hey!"

Hopper walks over to Powell and Callahan. "Anything?"

Powell shakes his head. "You?"

"No, nothing but a dead phone."

"Joyce?" Powell asks.

Hopper sighs. "About one step from falling off the edge."

Callahan shrugs. "She's been a few steps for a while now, hasn't she?"

Joyce looked offended.

Hopper's face hardens. "Kid's missing, man. Show a little class." He addresses the search party. "All right. Come on, let's go! We got a lot of ground to cover."

Callahan glances over at Powell. "The chief and her, they've screwed before, huh?"

"Gross!" Will and El chorused, causing Joyce and Hopper to reluctantly smile- it was nice seeing the two act like kids. For once.

Powell smirks and walks down the hill. "Will!"

Callahan follows. "That a "yeah" or did they..."

"Will!"

"Will!"

The scene cuts to the high school.

Barb is reading off of a stack of flash cards. "When alpha particles go through gold foil, they become..."

Nancy winced at the first sight of her dead friend.

Nancy inhales. "Unoccupied space."

Barb reads off the next one. "'A molecule that can' Hey!"

Steve snags the cards out of her hands. "I don't know, I think you've studied enough, Nance."

Nancy sighs. "Steve-"

Steve smirks, pausing. Tommy and Carol catch up and the whole group stands. "I'm telling you, you know, you got this. Don't worry. Now, on to more important matters. My dad has left town on a conference and my mom's gone with him, - 'cause, you know, she doesn't trust him."

The Harringtons scowled at their son. He ignored them.

Tommy snickers. "Good call."

*Now the Harringtons glared at Tommy/
Steve smiles. "So are you in?"*

Nancy looks confused. "In for what?"

Carol leans forward. "No parents? Big house?"

"A party?" Nancy frowns.

Tommy grins. "Ding, ding, ding!"

Nancy says, "It's Tuesday."

Carol laughs. "It's Tuesday! Oh, my God."

"Come on. It'll be low key. It'll just be us." Steve wheedles.

Carol raised an eyebrow. "What do you say?"

Tommy nods. "Are you in or are you out?"

Nancy hesitates. "Um..."

"The answer should be NO NO NO NO NO HELL NO!" Fate piped, startling the entire auditorium with her sudden, ear-piercing, bloodcurdling shrieks.

Carol becomes distracted, looking over at the bulletin board- or, more specifically, at Jonathan putting up a MISSING poster. "Oh, God. Look."

"Great." Jonathan sighed to himself.

"Oh, God, that's depressing." Steve says.

"By which I meant, that Will was missing, but also, I was an asshole, so sorry." Steve rambled awkwardly, not looking at Jonathan.
Nancy looks concerned. "Should we say something?"

Carol rolls her eyes. "I don't think he speaks."

Tommy grins rather ghoulishly. "How much you want to bet he killed him?"

"Oh my God, jerk." Fate spat. "You are such a jerk."

Tommy looked shocked- and he wasn't the only surprised one.

"Shut up." Steve snaps.

This also was surprising.

Nancy walks over. "Hey."

Jonathan looks up, startled. "Oh, hey."

Nancy inhales. "I just I wanted to say, you know, um, I'm sorry about everything." she hesitates. "Everyone's thinking about you." A pause, then, abruptly. "It sucks."

Jonathan lowers his hands from the poster briefly. "Yeah."

Nancy blinks, nervous. "I'm sure he's fine. He's a smart kid." The bell rings. "I have to go. Chemistry test."

"Yeah." Jonathan replies.

Nancy hesitates, then: "Good luck." She hurries away.

"Thanks." Jonathan says quietly.

"Heh." Fate chuckled quietly. "That reminds me of- me! When I'm trying to do this little thing called **socializing**. It's surprisingly difficult."

More than a few people gave the bubbly goddess a surprised look. She laughed.

"You have, like, **no idea** how awkward I am in real life."

The PA system turns on "Attention, faculty and students. At 8:00 p.m. tonight, there will be an assembly on the football field in support of Will Byers and his family. All are encouraged to attend. Volunteer sign-ups for search parties are still available in the office." As the announcement goes on, Jonathan leaves the school.

"Wait, what?" Joyce turned to stare at Jonathan, who grimaced awkwardly.

The scene cuts to the middle school, specifically the science classroom.

"Oh, this is weird." Lucas says, looking at one of two empty seats beside him.

Dustin agrees. "He's never this late."

Lucas scowls. "I'm telling you, his stupid plan failed."

Dustin looks at him. "I thought you liked his plan."

"Yeah, but obviously it was stupid, or he'd be here." Lucas snaps.

Dustin shakes his head. "If his mom found out a girl spent the night..."

Lucas frowns at the empty seat. "He's in deep shit right about now."

Dustin jumps. "Hey, what if she slept naked?"

"What is it with you and that?" asked Fate curiously. "Are you just, like, curious about it?"

Dustin squirmed and shrugged.

"Oh, my God, she didn't."

"Oh, if Mrs. Wheeler tells my parents-"

"No way. Mike would never rat us out."

"I don't know."

Lucas smacks his fist into his palm. "All that matters is, after school, the freak will be back in the loony bin, and we can focus on what really matters- finding Will."

El flinched, even though she'd been expecting the mean words. Lucas turned toward her, nervous, and apologized again. She smiled faintly,

but didn't reply.

The scene cuts to the Wheelers' kitchen.

Mike leads Eleven into the room. "You want anything to drink? We have OJ, skim milk... What else? Um, we have-" he cuts off as she walks into the living room. He follows.

"Oh, this is my living room. It's mostly just for watching TV. Nice, right?" He pats it. "It's a 22-inch. That's, like, ten times bigger than Dustin's."

"I am not good at math, so maybe that's why I can't figure it out, but how exactly does that work?" Fate asked Mike, who reddened and didn't respond.

Eleven wanders over to the fireplace and looks at the pictures on the mantel. She touches a picture of Nancy, smiling. "Pretty."

Nancy smiled over at El. "Thank you."

El smiled back.

Mike blinks. "I guess."

Fate laughed. "That is known in the fandom as the biggest burn- well, one of two- in the whole show."

"What's the other one?" asked Jennifer, her curiosity overcoming her fear.

"Season Two. I suppose I could tell you, but... that would ruin the fun." Fate grinned.

He moves forward. "That's my sister Nancy. And that's baby Holly. And those are my parents." The camera pans over the collection of pictures. Mike asks, "What are your parents like? Do they live close?"

"Actually, they do." Fate chirped.

"Who are they?" asked Mr. Clarke.

"Spoil-ers!" Fate singsonged.

Eleven doesn't answer, instead regarding the La-Z-Boy in the corner. Mike

walks over to it. *"That's our La-Z-Boy. It's where my dad sleeps. You can try it if you want."* He sits her in it.

"That does make me question your marriage." Fate remarked, suddenly solemn. Karen scowled, looking at Ted.

"Yeah. It's fun. Just trust me, okay?" He pulls the lever, tilting the chair back. She tenses, then smiles. Mike grins back. "See? Fun, right? Now you try." He sits back and watches as she pulls the lever herself, and both kids laugh.

That was nice to see, mused the teenaged and adult members of the PartyPlus. The six kids rarely acted like the thirteen(or twelve, in the past)-year-olds they were, so any moments like that were generally treasured.

The scene cuts to Jonathan's car. A song comes on, the lyrics ringing out.

"Darling, you got to let me know, Should I stay or should I go?" A flashback occurs. Jonathan and Will are sitting on Jonathan's bed, listening to the song.

Jonathan and Will glanced at each other, not sure what day this was.

Jonathan glances at Will. "You like it?"

Will nods. "Yeah, it's cool."

Oh. The day Jonathan had first introduced Will to The Clash.

"What, exactly," Powell asked, "is so important about the music children listen to?"

Fate rolled her eyes. "Just wait. This song is important."

Several people gave her doubtful looks, but she ignored them, instead saying, "You know, Stranger Things introduced my generation to eighties music. You know how often I hear the Clash outside of my parents? A lot."

Jonathan grins. "All right, you can keep the mix if you want."

"Really?" Will asks, brightening.

Jonathan nods. "Yeah, really. All the best stuff's on there. Joy Division, Bowie, Television, The Smiths... It'll totally change your life."

Will smiles. "Yeah, totally." He turns as Joyce's voice sounds in the background. "Where the hell are you, Lonnie? I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear it. This is ridiculous! I'm so sick of your excuses."

The whole Byers family winced. Minus Lonnie, who was scowling at Fate. He had a suspicion he would be introduced soon, and given how Fate had acted in the past, he suspected he would not be portrayed well.

*Jonathan gets up and shuts his bedroom door.
The Clash sings, "One day is fine and next is black,"*

Will looks at Jonathan. "He's not coming, is he?"

Jonathan sits down. "Do you even like baseball?"

*Will hesitates. "No, but... I don't know. It's fun to go with him sometimes."
Jonathan sighs. "Come on. Has he ever done anything with you that you actually like? You know, like the arcade or something?"*

"I don't know."

"No, all right? He hasn't. He's trying to force you to like normal things. And you shouldn't like things because people tell you you're supposed to. Okay? Especially not him."

Will nods.

Jonathan smiles. "But you like The Clash? For real?"

"For real. Definitely." Will says.

"It's a nice lesson. A lot of people quote it." remarked Fate, startling Jonathan more than a little bit.

The flashback ends, showing Jonathan gripping the steering wheel tightly. The song ends. "Should I cool it or should I blow? So you gotta let me know, Should I stay or should I go?"

"Are flashbacks gonna be a regular thing?" Callahan wanted to know.

"Oh, yeah. They'll make the emotional stakes higher- more people root for Will because of the flashbacks with him. They also tell the full story, before Eleven- uh, oops. Spoilers. The bad men, let's leave it at that." Fate slumped in her chair, turning her attention back to the screen.

The scene cuts to the general store.

Donald intercepts Joyce as she enters. "Joyce, I wasn't expecting you today. I brought Jeffrey in to cover."

Joyce keeps walking, then spins to face him. "I'm not here to work. I- The storm last night, I- I need a new phone."

Donald rings her up.

"Okay, that looks like \$22.56."

"Uh, yeah, you know, uh I gave Jonathan all my money for- for the copies, for the posters. Uh, I need an advance." Joyce says.

Donald hesitates. "Yes, well, of course. Of course." He starts writing.

"Sooooo reluctant." sneered Fate quietly.

Joyce leans forward. "Thank you. Yeah, uh, I was thinking, two weeks?"

Donald hesitates again. "Um. Yes, I understand, but, you know, I have to pay Jeffrey for covering-"

Joyce glares. "Donald. I've been here ten years, right? Have I ever called in sick or missed a shift once? I've worked, uh, Christmas Eve and Thanksgiving. I don't know where my boy is. He's gone. I don't know if I'm gonna ever see him again, if he's hurt I, uh I need this phone and two weeks' advance."

"Good for you... standing up for yourself." Fate said.

He starts writing. She inhales. "And a pack of Camels."

The scene cuts to the Byers house.

An agent knocks on the front door, wearing workmen clothes. No one answers, so he speaks into a radio: "We're all clear."

"What's going on there?" asked Powell.

A second agent responds. "Copy that."

Agents spread around the property, dressed in protective clothing. Brenner approaches the shed and enters. He finds the smashed boxes, and, more accurately, the slime. "Extraordinary."

"What's so extraordinary about slime?" sneered Carol.

"Hey, you're actually paying attention!" applauded Fate, quietly avoiding the question.

The scene cuts to Mike's room.

Mike is holding his Yoda figurine. "Ready are you? What knows you of ready?" His name's Yoda. He can use the Force to move things with his mind, like this. Whoosh! Oh, this is my dinosaur, Rory. Look, he has a speaker in his mouth so he can roar." He presses the button, then notices Eleven having crossed over to a shelf of trophies. He follows.

Mike now looked a little embarrassed, and Troy and James started laughing.

"Hey," Fate snapped. "You should see me and my sister playing with our toys. Seriously, we get waaay into it. We've broken three fashion dolls playing war. With the fashion dolls. We have different voices for every single doll." She settled back and hit play again, having paused it for her little rant.

"Oh, these are all my science fair trophies. We got first every year. Except for last year when we got third. Mr. Clarke said it was totally political."

The camera focuses on a picture of the four boys with their volcano, then shows Eleven focusing on it. Mike comes closer, confused. Eleven carefully places a finger on Will's image.

"What the heck?" asked Callahan. Fate smiled mysteriously. Mike stiffens. "You know Will? Did you see him? Last night? On the road?"

"Nooo," El murmurs. "Different."

Karen arrives home.

Mike freezes. "We gotta go." He drags Eleven down the stairs.

Karen raised an eyebrow at her son. He reddened, turning away.

Karen shuts the front door, beginning to turn. Mike races back up into his room, pulling Eleven after him.

Karen looks around. "Ted? Is that you?"

Mike shuts his door. "Just me, Mom!" He pulls open the closet, gesturing Eleven over.

Mike flinched. "I shouldn't have done that."

El placed a hand on his arm. "Okay. No choice." She smiled at him. He hesitantly smiled back. Fate put a hand over her mouth, a repressed squeal barely audible.

Karen calls, "Mike? What are you doing home?"

"Not being sick, I take it." Karen said, still looking at her son.

Mike calls back, "One second!" He turns to Eleven, gesturing into the closet. "In here. I'll be right back, okay?" She hesitates. He gestures again. "Please, you have to get in, or my mom, she'll find you. Do you understand? I won't tell her about you. I promise." Eleven shuffles into the closet, asking: "Promise?"

"She doesn't even know what a promise is?" sneered Troy. Fate gave him a reproving look.

"Watch it, or I'll **remove your mouth.**"

"You can do that?!" asked Dustin. "Do it!"

She laughed. "No, not yet. Unless he keeps saying stuff like that. He's not the only one at risk, either."

Mike blinks. "It means something that you can't break. Ever." He shuts the door.

Karen calls, "Michael?"

A flashback begins.

Eleven is shrieking as two men haul her down a hall. "Please? Pop! Papa!

Papa! No! Papa!" They toss her into a room. "No! No! No!" She scrambles to the door, but it slams. She hurls herself against it, screaming: "Papa! Papa! Papa! Papa! Papa." She staggers away, collapsing against one wall. The flashback ends, with her backing away from the door and sliding down the wall.

Multiple people were gasping in shock, having seen Dr. Brenner at the end of the hallway, watching. El was shaking, and the Party had moved to curl around her protectively.

The scene cuts to the living room. Karen and Mike are seated on the couch.

Mike is speaking. "I just- I don't feel good. I woke up and my head, it really hurt bad, and my throat was all scratchy, and I wanted to tell you, but the last time I told you I was sick - you made me go to school anyway, and-"

Karen cuts him off. "Michael."

Mike hesitates. "Yeah?"

Karen smiles at him. "I'm not mad at you."

"No?"

"No, of course not. All this that's been going on with Will, I can't imagine what it's been like for you. I just- I want you to feel like you can talk to me. I never want you to feel like you have to hide anything from me. I'm here for you. Okay?"

A thump sounds upstairs. Karen looks up. "Is there someone else here?"

Mike hesitates, then: "No."

Karen sighed. Fate chirped, "It's actually better that he didn't tell you, remember Benny."

The scene cuts back to Mike's room.

Mike rips open the closet door. "Eleven? Is everything okay? El?"

Eleven looks up at him, face tear-streaked. "Mike."

Mike crouches. "Is everything okay?" Eleven nods. He looks at her, worried. "Are you sure?"

"Promise." Eleven smiles.

"Aaw, it's so sweet!" Fate squealed. "I'm gonna get a toothache!"

Mike and El both blushed, looking down.

"That's **sweet?**" demanded Carol, sneering.

"Heck yeah! It's frigging adorable. I know everyone talks about that scene in Trick or Treat, Freak with the Void and the Supercomm and everything, and don't get me wrong, that scene is absolutely heartbreakingly adorable, but this scene is cute too!" Fate was waving her hands around, flailing with excitement. "Then again the whole ship is adorable!"

She cleared her throat. "Every ship has **those scenes** where you just can't- I can't even- Aaaaah!" she slid out of her seat, wiggling. Everyone stared at her, blinking as she slowly made her way back into her seat, now blushing. "Oops. Fangirl fit. Sorry."

The scene cuts to Sattler's Quarry.

Callahan and Hopper are standing on the edge. Callahan yells, "Will Byers! Will!"

Hopper holds out a hand. "Whoa, whoa. Careful, careful. I need you alive for the next few days, at least."

Callahan looks down over the edge. "Oh, hell, I could survive that." Hopper gives him a look. He waves a hand. "What? George Burness made the jump. And he was drunk as a skunk. He did it on a \$10 bet."

Hopper smirks. "George is a liar. You make that jump from this height, that water turns into cement. Hits you like a ton of bricks. Break every damn bone in your body."

"Oooh, foreshadowing!" Fate piped, grinning. She abruptly slumped. "Sort of..."

Callahan stares at him. "Nah."

Hopper's radio crackles. Flo speaks: "Chief, you copy?"

Hopper grabs his radio. "Yeah, Flo, talk to me."

Flo speaks again. "Hey, Chief, we got a call from over at Benny's. I think you need to get there right away."

The scene cuts to Benny's. Benny is slumped in a chair, blood on his head, gun in his hand. Flies buzz around as Hopper, Powell, and Callahan make their way over.

Powell grimaces. "Ugh, Jesus! Suicide?"

Hopper looks down at Benny. "Mmm-hmm."

"Mmm-mmm." Fate chirped, sounding distinctly like a small child in the midst of an argument.

Callahan shakes his head. "Missing kid, suicide... You must feel like a big city cop again, huh, Chief?"

Hopper sighs. "Well, I mostly dealt with strangers back then. Benny was my friend."

The scene cuts to a rainy Indianapolis street. Jonathan gets out of his car. He approaches one house and knocks. "Hello?"

Cynthia peers through the door. "Yeah. Can I help you?"

"Yeah, is Lonnie around?"

"Yeah, he's out back. What do you want?"

The scene cuts to black, then shows Jonathan inside, with Lonnie pinning him. "Get off!" Jonathan spits, shoving Lonnie.

"Wait, how did he get in?" asked Tommy, shaking his head.

Fate rolled her eyes. "Not important."

"Damn, you've gotten stronger." Lonnie steps back.

*"That's right." hissed Joyce in a dangerous tone. "Step the **hell** away."*

Several people eyed her nervously.

Cynthia comes into the hallway. "Will someone please explain what the hell is going on?"

Lonnie casually says, "Jonathan, Cynthia. Cynthia, this is Jonathan. My oldest. Come here." He moves to hug Jonathan, who jerks away. "Get off me, man."

"What the- he just slammed you into the wall? And he's acting like you should hug him?" Nancy fumed.

The scene cuts to Mike's room. Lucas, Mike, and Dustin are standing near the door. Eleven is sitting on Mike's bed.

Lucas glares at Mike. "Are you out of your mind?"

"Just listen to me." Mike says.

Lucas steps back. "You are out of your mind!"

Mike blurts, "She knows about Will."

Lucas blinks. "What do you mean she knows about Will?"

Mike gestures at the picture. "She pointed at him, at his picture. She knew he was missing. I could tell."

"You could tell." Lucas repeats sarcastically.

"I suppose it's a little strange." Fate paused. "Then again, it's right in the name!" she cackled.

Mike inhales. "Just think about it. Do you really think it was a coincidence that we found her on Mirkwood, the same place where Will disappeared?"

"Actually, it is." Fate said with a shrug.

Dustin speaks up. "That is weird."

Mike continues. "And she said bad people are after her. I think maybe these bad people are the same ones that took Will. I think she knows what happened to him."

"Well... she knew what happened to it, but it wasn't the bad men." Fate shrugged. "But this show certainly leaves you guessing... and yelling at the screen... because you have more pieces than the characters do." she sighed.

Lucas glares. "Then why doesn't she tell us?" He turns to Eleven, stomping over. "Do you know where he is? Do you know where Will is?"

"Stop it, you're scaring her!" Mike yells.

Lucas winced.

Lucas whips around. "She should be scared! If you know where he is, tell us!"

Dustin shakes his head. "This is nuts."

Lucas straightens. "We have to take her to your mom."

Mike shakes his head hard. "No! Eleven said telling any adult would put us in danger."

Dustin tenses. "What kind of danger?"

"Good." Claudia was very, very tense. "Good. Focus on what might happen if you told someone." She looked at her son severely. "I am not encouraging keeping secrets, Dusty, but things like that..."

Dustin nodded obediently.

Lucas scowls. "Her name is Eleven?"

"That is weird." Powell mused. "And the tattoo and everything..."

Mike nods. "El for short."

Dustin steps forward. "Mike! What kind of danger?"

"Danger danger." Mike folds his hand into a gun shape, then points it... first at Dustin, who tenses, then at Lucas... who slaps Mike's wrist.

"Sorry." Lucas apologized. Mike shrugged. "It's okay, you were just scared."

Lucas storms to the door. "No, no, no! We're going back to plan A. We're telling your mom." He grabs the knob and opens the door. It slams. He freezes, then opens it again. It slams and locks. The boys turn slowly toward Eleven, sitting on the bed with blood trickling out of her nose.

"Wait..." voiced Mr. Clarke. "That shouldn't be possible..."

"Did **she** do that?" questioned Callahan, looking incredulous.

Fate smiled peaceably.

She speaks. "No."

The scene cuts to Lonnie's backyard.

Lonnie paces over to a car. "Take a look at this beaut. Should've seen it when I got it. Took me a year, but it's almost done."

Jonathan opens the trunk, then slams it.

Lonnie sighs. "Really? You want to check up my ass, too? I told you the same thing as I told those cops, he's not here and he never has been."

Jonathan glares at him. "Then why didn't you call Mom back?"

"The **million**-dollar question." sighed Fate. "Why?"

Lonnie shrugs. "I don't know, I just I assumed she just... forgot where he was. You know, he was lost or something. That boy never was very good at taking care of himself."

The Party all glared over at the real Lonnie.

Jonathan steps toward Lonnie. "This isn't some joke, all right? There are search parties, reporters-"

Lonnie smirks. "Hopper's not still chief, is he?"

"Why is that relevant?" demanded Hopper. Lonnie glowered at him. Fate smirked slightly, watching the interaction.

Jonathan doesn't reply. Lonnie looks around. "Tell your mother she's gotta get you out of that hellhole. Come out here to the city. People are more real here, you know? And then I could see you more."

Jonathan grimaces.

"What, you think I don't want to see you?" Lonnie demands.

Jonathan glares at him. "I know you don't."

Lonnie sighs again. "See, that's your mother talkin' right there. She even know you're here?" Jonathan hesitates. Lonnie grimaces. "Oh, great. So one kid goes missing, the other one runs wild? Some real fine parenting right there."

Jonathan glares at him again. It's clear how much he hates Lonnie.

"You're only there looking for Will, right?" Steve checked. Jonathan nodded, grimacing, his expression quite similar to his on-screen counterpart's.

Lonnie waves a hand. "Look, all I'm saying is, maybe I'm not the asshole, all right?"

"Riiiiight." drawled Fate.

Jonathan seethes and walks back toward the street, slapping a poster into Lonnie's chest. He spits out, "In case you forgot what he looks like."

Lonnie unfolds the poster. Cynthia comes over and rests her chin on his shoulder, looking at the poster, then at Lonnie. She smirks.

"He's kinda cute, hmm? Maybe I'll trade you in for the younger model?"

Will flinched, not sure whether she meant him or Jonathan. The rest of the Party curled protectively around him, glaring over at Lonnie and Cynthia.

Lonnie looks offended.

The scene cuts to the police station.

Earl is sitting, fumbling with a lighter and a cigarette. Hopper holds out a working lighter, and Earl nods his thanks. "Just doesn't make any sense, Chief."

Hopper shifts. "You, uh, notice anything odd about him the last few weeks?"

Earl shakes his head. "No, we're fixin' to go fishing down the Etowah next Sunday. I mean, he was lookin' forward to it. I know that."

"No one made it to that trip." muttered Fate darkly. "Stupid Brenner." Hopper says, "He got any enemies you might know about? I mean, people who might not want him around?"

"Guess he made enemies by helping El..." Lucas murmured uneasily. El winced.

Earl shakes his head again. "The exes didn't like him much. That's for sure, but nah."

"When was the last time you saw him?" Hopper asks.

"Yesterday. Lunch, same as always."

Hopper nods slowly. "Just you and the boys?"

"Yep. Me and Henry and- Well, there was this, uh, this kid."

Callahan shakes his head. "No kid did this."

Hopper leans forward. "Kid? What are you talking about?"

Earl nods. "Yeah. At lunch, uh, there was this boy that, uh I mean, he was trying to steal food out of Benny's kitchen. Can you imagine that?"

El huffed. "Not a boy!"

Several people looked at her, confused as to her immediate reaction. After all, she was Jane Hopper, not Eleven... right?

Hopper nods over at Callahan, who gets up and walks away. "This kid. What'd he look like?"

"Well, he was about yea high." Earl holds his hand out.

El looked offended.

"You know, tiny like. I didn't get a good look at him, though. He was back in the kitchen."

Callahan returns with a copy of Will's MISSING poster.

Hopper takes it and holds it out to Earl. "He look like this?"

Earl shakes his head. "Oh, no, that's- That's Lonnie's missin' kid. No. This was a different kid. This one had really short hair. I mean, it was buzzed nearly down to the scalp." He gestures.

Hopper sighs. "Yeah, well, let's- You know, let's forget about the haircut. I mean, if this kid had a buzz cut could it be Lonnie's kid?"

Earl hesitates. "Well, I- I didn't get a good look at him. About the right height, though. I mean, could've been. Yeah, that's- Could've been."

Will shook his head. "Nope, I didn't cut my hair."

Max grinned at him, leaning forward and ruffling his soft brown bowl cut. "Have you cut it at all since?"

He squeaked, ducking away, and she laughed lightly.

Again, the teens and adults of the PartyPlus watched with pleasure.

The scene cuts to Nancy's room. Nancy is lying on her bed, talking on the

phone.

Uh-oh, Nancy thought.

"Because I don't want to go by myself. Barb- Barb, it's not rocket science. You just tell your parents you're gonna stay at my place afterwards. No, tell them we're studying."

Karen just shook her head.

Karen calls, "Nancy! Dinner!"

"Coming!" Nancy shouts. She returns to the phone. "Look, I gotta go. I'll see you in an hour." She hangs up.

The scene cuts to the Wheeler dining room. Lucas and Dustin have, it appears, stayed for dinner. The three boys pick at their food.

Karen eyes them. "Something wrong with the meatloaf?"

Dustin smiles at her nervously. "Oh, no, I had two bologna sandwiches for lunch. I don't know why." he trails off.

"You need to work on your excuses." sighed Fate, shaking her head. "It was especially suspicious when Lucas agreed." She paused. "Well, the worst was 'Cousin Eleanor', geez."

Mike, Lucas, and Dustin cringed.

Lucas stiffly states, "Me, too."

Nancy smiles sweetly at Karen. "It's delicious, Mommy."

"Aah, the process of sucking up to parents." sighed Fate dramatically. "I know it well, alas. Since I'm failing a double class right now." she rubbed her face. "And I dooon't knooooow hooooow to fix it... aaah..."

Several students winced in sympathy.

Karen smiles at her daughter. "Thank you, sweetie."

Nancy twirls her fork. "So, there's this special assembly thing tonight for Will at the school field. Barb's driving."

"Liar..." murmured Fate softly.

Karen frowns, now mildly suspicious. "Why am I just hearing about this?"

Nancy fakes surprise. "I thought you knew."

Karen sighs. "I told you, I don't want you out after dark until Will is found."

Nancy nods. "I know, I know, but it'd be super weird if I'm not there. I mean, everyone's going."

Karen finally agrees. "Just be back by 10:00." Her eyes fall on the boys. "Why don't you take the boys, too?"

"No!" Mike blurts.

"Mmm-mmm." Dustin shakes his head.

"And that reaction doesn't at all scream 'up to something'." Fate rolled her eyes.

Karen frowns at them. "Don't you think you should be there? For Will?"

Mike sees Eleven coming down the stairs and chokes on his milk. Karen starts to turn. Dustin hits the table and Karen turns back around. He looks embarrassed. "Sorry. Spasm."

Dustin gave his mother a nervous grin when she gave him a look.

Karen moves to soothe Holly. "Oh it's okay, Holly. It's just a loud noise."

The scene cuts to the outside of Benny's Burgers.

Hopper walks out of the restaurant. "Will! Better come out, buddy."

"I wish I could've." Will muttered.

Callahan follows. "Will, where are ya?" He glances at Hopper as they move into the dark woods. "Hey, you think Earl really saw Will? I mean, what's he doin' with a shaved head? And stealing food from Benny?"

Hopper whacks Callahan's chest. "Tell you what, when we find him, we'll ask." He moves away.

Callahan shakes his head. "Can't ask a corpse questions."

"Well, he's not dead." Dustin said cheerfully.

Mr. Clarke calls out, "Hold up!"

Hopper instantly moves over. "You got something? Hey, what do you got?" He crouches next to Mr. Clarke. Mr. Clarke replies, "Not sure. Maybe nothing. I found this." He holds up a scrap of white cloth with a flower

pattern. "In there." He points at the tunnel.

Callahan shakes his head. "No way a kid crawls through there."

Hopper frowns. "I don't know, a scared enough one might. His brother said he was good at hiding."

"It wasn't me." Will murmured, taking El's hand. She smiled at him.

The scene cuts to the Wheeler basement, where the boys are coming down the stairs. Eleven is back in the blanket fort.

Mike carries a silver tray over. "El? No adults. Just us and some meatloaf." She looks at Dustin and Lucas. Mike notices. "Don't worry. They won't tell anyone about you. They promise. Right?"

Dustin nods. "We never would've upset you if we knew you had superpowers." Mike hits him. Dustin yelps. "Ow!"

"Dusty." scolded his mother. Dustin winced.

Mike rolls his eyes. "What Dustin is trying to say is that they were just scared earlier. That's all."

Dustin and Lucas nod.

"We just wanted to find our friend." Lucas says.

Eleven blinks hesitantly. "Friend?"

Lucas frowns. "Yeah, friend. Will?"

Eleven leans forward. "What is "friend"?"

"She doesn't know what a friend is?" laughed Troy.

Lucas looks at the others. "Is she serious?"

Mike looks at Eleven. "Um, a friend Is someone that you'd do anything for."

"Most of the time." Fate corrected solemnly. "Some friends aren't willing to go that far." A beat, then she smiled. "You guys would, though... and have."

Some people shot the Party concerned looks.

Dustin nods. "You lend them your cool stuff, like comic books and trading

cards."

Mike says solemnly, "And they never break a promise."

Lucas nods. "Especially when there's spit."

"Spit?" Eleven frowns a little.

Lucas nods again. "A spit swear means-" he spat into his hand- "you never break your word." He grabs Dustin's hand and shakes. "It's a bond."

Dustin wipes his hand on his shirt, looking disgusted.

"Eew." Max muttered. "I agree with Dustin's expression there."

Mike looks at Eleven intently. "That's super important, because friends they tell each other things. Things that parents don't know."

The scene cuts to blackness for several minutes, then Hopper's voice narrates. "You ever feel cursed? You know, the last person to go missing here was in, uh the summer of '23. The last suicide was the fall of '61."

"Why the long pause?"

"Not plot relev- never mind, it is plot relevant, but you'll understand fine without it." Fate said dismissively.

The scene brightens to show the Wheeler basement. Eleven is sitting in front of the DnD board. The boys watch as she stretches her hands out and places them on the edge of the board.

Lucas scowls. "What's the weirdo doing?"

Mike leans forward. "El?"

Eleven opens her eyes and picks up a piece- a wizard. "Will."

"Wha?" someone asked.

"That's my piece." Will said softly.

Several people shivered.

"Superpowers." Dustin whispers.

Mike looks intently at El. "Did you see him? On Mirkwood?"

She shook her head.

"Do you know where he is?" Mike asks. Eleven sweeps all of the pieces off of the DnD board, then flips it over. She places Will's wizard on the board.

"I don't understand." said Mr. Sinclair. Fate laughed, then noticed his expression. "Oh, sorry, it's just... you'll see."

"I don't understand." Mike says.

"Oh," Mr. Sinclair mutters.

Eleven tilts her head. "Hiding."

Mike frowns. "Will is hiding? From the bad men?" Eleven shakes her head. He leans forward. "Then from who?" he asks.

She delicately takes a piece from among the scattered figurines. Then places it on the board, gently. The camera focuses. It's the Demogorgon. The boys gasp.

"The Demogorgon?" asked Karen, frowning.

The scene cuts to the police barricade. Jonathan's car pulls to a stop there, and he gets out. He goes around to the trunk and gets out his camera, then ducks under the police barricade. He starts taking pictures. "Where are you?" he asks the empty forest.

The scene again fades to black for several minutes.

"Okay, what the hell?" demanded Carol, looking angry. "You're cutting out a lot!"

"There should be less and less as the episodes go on." Fate responded.

Then it comes up on Joyce, asleep in a chair. Phone on her lap. It rings, startling her awake.

Joyce picks up the phone. "Hello? Hello. Who is this?"

Breathing. She gasps. "Will? Will, it's me. Talk to me. I'm here. Just tell me where you are, honey. I can hear you. Please."

Will voice sounds from the receiver. "Mom?"

Several people who had dismissed the earlier call gasped.

Joyce inhales sharply. "Will! Yes, it's me. It's me. Where are you? Where are you? Just talk to me-" the phone short-circuits.

"I did say more..." Will mumbled. "It didn't get across I guess..."

Joyce leaned forward, hugged him.

The scene fades to black, then fades back in to show Joyce, walking down the hallway, following the lights as they turn on. She walks into Will's room, and over to a light. The lamp glows brighter and she cups it, confused, and murmurs, "Will?" Will's stereo flips on, and she turns, startled, as Should I Stay or Should I Go? plays. Then it turns off, just as abruptly.

"What the heck? How is that happening?" someone demanded.

"Oh boy does it get weirder." Fate smiled. "You know, the amount of fanart with the lights..."

*The wall bulges out, and she turns, eyes widening, as a huge, clawed hand presses **through the wall**. She screams silently, backing out of the room, then runs to her car. There she hesitates, looking back at the house. Lights flip on, Will's stereo starts playing again- she runs back inside.*

"What the hell... what happened to the wall?" demanded Mr. Sinclair.

The scene cuts to Barb, at Steve's house by the pool. Her hand bleeds into the water and she looks down at it. Then the pool lights go out. The credits roll.

"What!" gasped Mr. Holland. "What happened?"

"That's the end?" asked Karen.

"For now... next episode!" Fate chirped.

"The blood..." mumbled Nancy, gripping Steve's hand tightly. He squeezed her hand.

AN: Do not expect daily posting. I've posted this on AO3 as well, and have actually written through The Spy. Please review, I'd love to hear your opinions!